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ILLUSTRATED STORIES

VOL. LIII. CHICAGO, ILL., SATURDAY, JANUARY 10, 1925. NO. 2.

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CHAPTER ONE.

"I looked over Jordan, and what did I see-e-e, Comin' for to carry me ho-o-o-me, A band of angels comin' after me-e-e, Comin' for to carry me ho-o-o-me."

THE TWISTED FOOT

A Story of the West at Its Worst—and Best. Buff Warren Goes Against Every Tradition and Protects a Family of "Nesters." There's a Reason: Gillian Fair. But Even She Is Startled at Times by His Whirlwind Championship and Its Unexpected Consequences. The Liveliest Western Story You Ever Read.

BY WILLIAM PATTERSON WHITE

"YOU'RE mistaken, Bill," declared his cousin, Buff Warren, when the singer paused to take breath for the next verse; "that wasn't any band of angels you saw. That was a posse, and I wish they'd caught you and hung you good. Can't you sing without making all that noise?"

"If he could, he'd be in grand opera," snorted freckle-faced Bill Allen from the depths of the bunk-house towel.

"What say we throw him out?" suggested Tile Stanton, who was sitting on the edge of his bunk pulling on his trousers.

"I'd like to see you try throwin' me out!" cried Bill Holliday, reaching purposefully for Tile, but colliding instead with his cousin, Buff. The latter seized him wholeheartedly, and they wrestled each other across the room and fell headlong over the doorsill. The more agile Buff, having contrived to roll Holliday and put him face downward in the grass, turned to shout for Tile, but paused with his mouth open. For there was a girl within twenty feet of him, a girl on a horse, a pretty girl with honey-colored hair and amber eyes, a girl that made him think of home and the blue Pennsylvania hills and cowbells tinkling thru the dusk and mountain laurel and the sweet scent of the "honeysuckles" along a dusty road. It did not strike him at the moment that the horse she rode was thin, that she was shabby in a man's shirt, an old skirt patched over one knee, and scuffed boots. No, the significance of these things did not sink in, because when he glimpsed her she pushed back on her hatless head the mop of honey-colored hair and smiled at him sweetly.

Buff immediately felt a warm, cheery sensation permeate his breakfastless being and absent-mindedly ground his cousin's nose a trifle deeper into the grass as he smiled back.

"Good morning," said the girl in a voice that was own fellow to the smile. "Have you seen anything of a gray mule around here?"

"Is this it?" he asked idiotically, jerking his chin at the man he was holding down, for the warm, cheery sensation was affecting his brain like raw whisky, only more pleasantly. "Is this it?" he repeated to her stare of surprise.

The smile had left the girl's face, but two dimples had come instead. "No," she said with a serious shake of her head.

"I expect your mule had four legs," said he, his idiocy still upon him, totally unmindful of the fact that he was punching for the 88 outfit and that there was work to do that day. "I-I—if you'll wait a shake I'll get my horse and help hunt that mule."

"I can't let you do that," she said with finality and picked up her bridle. "I guess that mule didn't come this far, anyway. So long." She gave him a friendly nod and kicked her thin mount into a trot.

Buff remained where he was, staring after that honey-colored head. "My gosh!" he whispered. "My gosh!"

"It'll be my Gawd and some more yet if you don't lemme up!" the voice of Bill Holliday filtered thru the grass in a rabid snarl.

Buff absentedly released the arm that he held bent over the small of his cousin's back and arose. His cousin arose, too, muttering and rubbing the aforementioned arm.

"So-and-so and such-and-such," breathed the cousin in part (the girl had not yet passed beyond the blacksmith shop). "What you trying to do, break my arm? If that girl hadn't been there, I'd have——" He paused. Words failed him.

Buff seized him by the shoulder. "Did you ever see anything like her?" he demanded eagerly.

His cousin twitched away with a cry. "That's the shoulder you almost put out of joint!" he snapped. "A joke's a joke, damitall, but you're too much of a humorist."

Buff Warren cast a glance over his shoulder at the bunk-house. From the open doorway came the brisk chatter of Bill Allen arguing anent the merits of his pet pony. Evidently none of the 88 boys had witnessed either the arrival or the departure of the girl on the thin horse.

"Calling me a mule in front of her!" grumbled Holliday, boiling over with his grievance. "Helluva note. A mule. What you do it for? I've a good mind to bust you one, by jucks."

Buff held up a restraining hand. "Be calm, be very calm. I have some news for you." He came close, and when the touchy William shied away, he plucked him by the sleeve. "You see that girl?" he continued. "You see that girl?" he repeated in a more earnest tone, when his cousin blinked at him.

"Yeah," said Holliday crossly, "I see her."

"Take a good look at her. She's my girl, she is."

"Your girl!" exclaimed Bill.

"Mine." Buff declared firmly. "Who is she?" Great interest on the part of Bill.

"I don't know."

"But you said——"

"And I meant every word I said," averred Buff, regarding his mystified relative with some truculence.

Holliday batted his eyes. "Then if she's your girl you'd ought to know who she is."

"How could I know? I never saw her before."

"You never saw her before?" Holliday repeated bewilderedly, then put up a stiffened forefinger and rotated it beside his left ear. "Wheezy, hear 'em buzz. Or else you're drunk. If so," he added hopefully, "where did you hide the bottle?"

Buff paid Holliday no further attention. Legs spread, hands on hips, he stood at gaze and beamed. Honey-colored hair and amber eyes, the Pennsylvania hills, the honeysuckles, the—"I ain't deaf," he said coldly to his cousin.

"You sure act like it. I only repeated myself four times in your ear. I want to get this straight, Buff. You never saw this girl before, but she's your girl. How do you explain it, and does she know it?"

"I ain't, and she don't, but she will." With which apparently cryptic remark Buff turned and entered the kitchen in obedience to the cook's bawl of "Come and get it."

"Ub-glub-blub-blah," Alonzo Peters announced brightly in the middle of his breakfast.

"I think so too," assented Buff. "In fact we're all with you, 'Lonzo."

"'Lonzo's gone back to his happy childhood," said Tile Stanton.

"First I knew he ever left it," said Buff.

"Take another mouthful, 'Lonzo," suggested Dan Gildersleeve kindly. "Then maybe I can understand you."

"Talkin' and eatin' are two men's work," said Buff. "'Lonzo ought to be twins."

"Tain't necessary," snarled Jimmy the cook. "He eats more than any six men right now."

Alonzo swallowed hard, constrictor-wise, drank half a cup of coffee at a gulp, sighed deeply and said, "I hear the Twisted Foot got a steer buyer from Piegan and nine hundred dollars three days ago."

"The son-of-a-gun!" exclaimed Buff. "Who told you?"

"Rum. I saw him just now when I went up to the office for tobacco."

"That makes nine he's beefed in four years," said Bill Allen.

"Ten," corrected Bill Holliday. "And no one knows how many holdups when there wasn't a burial. He's sure a slide-winder, that fellah. Pass the salt, will you, Bill?"

Then the arrival of a fresh plate of steaks distracted their attention and they forgot for the nonce the Twisted Foot, that criminal par excellence of the territory. The name of the Twisted Foot was derived from the fact that while the track of the murderer's left foot was in every way normal, that of the right one, instead of curving properly to the left, bent to the right.

The Twisted Foot confined his criminal activities to holdups—stage and individual. He robbed women as well as men. As Bill Holliday said, at least ten leading citizens within the past four years had been found murdered and robbed, in the immediate vicinity of the bodies a few boot marks of a twisted foot and a cigarette butt or two of the peculiar "saddleblanket" papers of the Southwest. Not a month passed without its holdup by the Twisted Foot. There were other holdups by other talent, but these were spur-of-the-moment, negligible affairs in which small sums had been taken. The robberies of the Twisted Foot were always for large amounts. He had an uncanny faculty of determining whose poke was full of gold eagles.

In every case that the Twisted Foot did not kill, it was his harsh custom to wound. He invariably shot from behind. Despite this apparently cowardly propensity, coupled with his habit of running away when the odds were even or against him, he could fight and fight well when the issue was forced upon him. Once, when cut off and surrounded by the Sunset County sheriff and three deputies, he had fought the four to a standstill, killing two deputies, badly wounding the third and grazing the sheriff. Following which set-to he had escaped as usual. He always escaped. Folks had come to believe he had nine lives, would. So often were the movements of the Twisted Foot that a ghostly character would have been attributed to him were it not for the dead bodies of his victims. A ghost does not carry firearms.

BUFF, saddling in the corral after breakfast, was not nearly so happy as the proverbial lark. In spite of the confident remarks he had made to his cousin he could not quite fathom how he was ever going to see that girl again, much less the latter his name. "Idjit," he told himself, his head under the left fender. "Idjit. I always did ford the creek before I reached it. Hold still, you four-legged accordion!"

But the four-legged accordion had a mind of his own. It was several minutes before Buff could pass the cinch strap in the last turn, take his loop and pull it tight. The others had all left the corral when he led out and closed the gate.

"Now, Idjit!"

He looked up. Rum Gordon, the foreman, was walking toward him from the ranch-house. Behind Rum came Sam Caltrop, manager and majority stockholder of the 88.

"What you doing today, Buff?" asked Rum.

"Farewell, you told me, for the mail."

"Sure enough. I forgot. Well, on your way back, I wish you'd stop at McFluke's old place and tell any nesters you find there to travel."

"First I heard they're any there."

"Tim Page of the Bar S told me yesterday. He saw 'em when he passed that way hunting stray horses. Anyway, they've got to drag it."

"And make it strong, Buff," chipped in Sam Caltrop. "I believe in the Golden Rule, and I'm the last map to be hard on anybody, but I can't have nesters on the range. Sooner have the itch."

"All right," said Buff shortly, and topped his mount.

The horse, a red-tempered blue, went up like a shot. Buff socked home the spurs and laced him across the nose with his quirt. The brute sneezed and began to side-wheel.

"Quit it!" Buff grated between set teeth. "Quit it! I don't feel like foolin' any. You will, huh! Aw right, let her slipper!"

He raked the horse's flanks with the spurs till they looked like a plowed field. The blue rocketed over the landscape with all the verve and abandon of a distracted jack rabbit. Then, the

The Trail of the Twisted Foot.

prodding spurs weakening the zest of the performance, the horse's frantic fury died. But Buff would not have it so. "No, no Blue-tirass, no easy li'l road gait for you," he cried, and thoroly whanged the blue behind the saddle. "You wanted to hop, so hop!"

But hopping was now the last thing desired by the tormented bine. He ran as only a cow horse can. When Buff slowed him down under a cutbank three miles from the ranch-house he was a very good horse.

Buff rolled a cigarette one-handed, snapped a match into flame with his thumb nail and lit the brown roll. He inhaled deeply, coughed, choked on an expletive, and snatched at the hat that was on the point of parting company with his black hair. Which cough, choke and snatch had been called forth by the frenzied side-leap of his horse. Buff stayed with him, but his head snapped on his neck with a force that made it ache.

The cause of the shy was the rattling descent of the cutbank by a horse and rider. Buff dragged his mount to a standstill. A gleam of pleasure lit his eye when he recognized the rider.

"Howdy, Rainbow," said he, and "Rafferty's dead."

"No! Is he?" exclaimed Buff, for Rafferty was the sheriff's chief deputy and a personage in the county. "Who killed him?"

"Acute toxic coma, complicated by a fracture of the cervica' vertebrae, so Doc Homer said, but it looked to me like plain old-fashioned D. T.'s and the broken neck he got when he fell out the window of Laney's Hotel. Doc ought to have known the symptoms, Rafferty alone when he gets that way. He'll know better next time, the nitwit," she added vindictively, not so much because she deplored the removal of Rafferty, as because she detested inefficiency.

"I suppose the sheriff's shoved up that featherbed, Nap Tobias, to chief deputy and appointed Rupe Wilton to the vacancy. He always did want the job."

"Yes, to the first, no, to the second," said the Rainbow. "Rupe got a job on the railroad last week—Pregnal City. I wish I was a man."

"I don't. You make too good-looking a girl."

"Don't try to feed me sugar. I know you, you flirt. Anyway, I wish I was a man. Why do I wish I was a man? I wish I was a man so I could go to Mr. Sheriff's Joe Mack and strike him for that deputy's job."

Buff Warren was moved to laugh. "I don't think much of your ambition," he told her bluntly. "What's a second deputy? A li'l less than half o' nothin'."

Her black eyes sparkled with irritation. "A job is what you make of it! Just because Nap Tobias always was a figurehead like Rafferty, it don't signify that he has to be one. No, if he had any gumip—but he hasn't, not a bit. And the sheriff runs his office to suit himself."

"And his friends."

Her scorn was superb. "And his friends, his highly honorable friends! Oh, you men, you're a putrid lot."

"Here! What's biting you?" demanded Buff.

"What did I ever do?"

"Nothing—that's just it. You're like all the rest of the bunch. You don't amount to anything, you never will amount to anything, and what's more, you don't want to amount to anything. Would you turn your hand to right a wrong? Not you. So long as you get three meals a day and don't freeze to death, you've got the comfortable idea that all the rest of the world is well fed and warm as toast. Oh, you men! You make me sick!"

"You've been reading those dime novels again," Buff remarked placidly, "and somebody has been feeding you the meat."

"I'd enjoy boxing your silly ears!" snarled the Rainbow. "I'll bet I know where you're going this minute. You're going to McFluke's old place to tell the Fairs to go."

"You'd lose. I ain't going there till tomorrow. Is Fair the name of those nesters?"

"Yes, Fair's the name of those nesters. It's a shame, Bitrop doesn't run a fence around the whole township and be done with it. You'd think he owned the earth, the way he acts about skidding! Mame's all right, and I like her, but her husband will pinch a dollar till Liberty goes black in the face!"

"Outside of that, he's all right, huh?"

"And I suppose you'll enjoy the job of telling 'em to get out."

"We-ell, I don't know that I'll enjoy it exactly," Buff defended himself weakly, "but you know how it is, Rainbow; we can't have nesters ballin' up the range till you can't turn around, and rustling cows with wolves and coyotes and lions it's bad enough now. A fellah has to make a profit."

The Rainbow set her stubborn chin. "It's free range."

"Sure it is—for the cattlemen."

"For everybody."

He shook his head. "You're wrong there. We were here first."

"And of course that—oh, what's the use of arguing with a mule! All I have to say, it's a crying shame, and I wish I was a man for about six months! I'd show 'em!"

"In the meantime, Rainbow, while you're busy wishing for the moon this-away, you might tell me something. You know everybody and everything in the county, just about. Do you know a girl with browny-goldy-yellow hair, amber-colored eyes and a bay horse kind of thin with two white feet and a wall-eye? Yeah, and she wears a white handkerchief with three blue stripes on the border round her neck."

The Rainbow dropped her eyelids. When she raised them there was an odd glint in the depths of her eyes. When she spoke the harsh note had completely vanished from her voice. She almost cooed like a dove. "Browny-goldy-yellowy hair with three blue stripes, you say? About 30 or 40 years old, isn't she?"

"No, she isn't she, smarty! Girl about 20, I guess."

"About 20," mused the Rainbow, finger on lip. "And she's kind of thin with a wall-eye and two white feet."

"That was the horse, I told you."

"Excuse me. Don't mumble your words next time. Yes, I think I know the blue-striped girl you mean. The horse, too, for that matter. I suppose you want to find the girl so you can buy the horse. Is that the idea?"

"Something like that. Where's she live?"

"I wonder do you really want to know?" "What do you suppose I keep asking you for?"

"I hoped you were doin it as an excuse to talk to me. I see I was mistaken. My heart is broken. I'll never believe another man again. Never."

"Listen here, Rainbow," said Buff, in his most wheedling tone, "quit your devilling, there's a good girl, and tell Buffy what he wants to know."

"Wouldn't you like me to?"

"And they say women were put in the world to be a help. A help! Rainbow, I wish I was your pa for ten minutes. I do so."

"All right," said Rainbow, "I'll tell you"—Buff's face lighted like a sunrise—"but not today"—sunset and evening star—"Come around tomorrow, Buff, and if you still want to know, I'll tell you then. Tell you what I'll do," she added, ignoring his protests, "I'll make a bet with you. Oh, shut up! Don't be such an infernal baby! Anybody would think you were three years old, the way you act. If you can't have what you want when you want it, you sulk and kick the furniture. This bet now, I'll bet you the best split-ear bridle in the Blue Pigeon store that you don't run off the Fairs."

"Won't I? You'll see."

"Caitrop may, but you won't have a hand in it."

"You mean they'll try to rub me out?"

"No, I don't. They're not that kind. They're good people. I mean what I say; you won't be a party to running them off."

"The best split-ear in the Blue Pigeon. Can I pick it out myself?"

"If you win."

"The little hoss is wearing it already. Your camp still in Rattlesnake Draw? Good enough. I'll ce around tomorrow to find out where that girl is at, and tell you I won the bet. So long."

The Rainbow tickled her horse into a trot. "What cocksure fools men are," she said aloud. "I know the very bridle I'm going to have."

BUFF, the ranch mail in a gunnysack on his saddle and one of the Canton's best meals under his belt, went into the Starlight saloon for something to top off with. He found the place empty of customers and Hilarie Chavez, the Mexican bartender, in process of being fired by Mrs. Fernie, the owner.

"It isn't that you don't take in enough cash," complained the owner, who was behind the bar, as the bartender was in front of it. "But you don't put enough into the till. So you can drag it—now."

"Is that so?" said the bartender, who, with his employer's wife, was unconscious that a guest had entered. "Is that so? "Where's my money?"

"There."

A little heap of gold and silver lay on the top of the bar. As she spoke the lady pushed the pile toward the man, which action was evidently what he had been waiting for. He seized her wrist and pulled her forward and partly across the bar.

A knife appeared in his right hand. "I go," he chuckled, "but I'll take something with me besides my wages—your beauty. Scream, I slit your throat. Ah-h-h!"

The ballance of his remarks was caused by Buff jamming the muzzle of his six-shooter into the small of his back.

"Let her go, Hilario," murmured Buff, his hand on the other's collar. "Lay it down. Let the lady go. That's right. You're a sensible man, I see, and would like to depart in peace, not pieces. I don't hear you laugh. You should cultivate a sense of humor, Hilario. It will help you over many a rough place, just as I'm going to help you over this doorsill."

While he kept up his steady flow of conversation Buff had been propelling Chavez toward the door. The door was open. With an accurately placed toe he kicked Chavez thru the doorway. The man, his body bowed outward, skittered across the sidewalk and fell on his face in the roadway.

Buff stood in the doorway watching him as he scrambled to his feet and dusted himself with angry spats of the hand. "Here's your knife, Hilario," said Buff, and tossed him the blade—in two pieces.

Chavez looked at the broken blade. He looked at Buff and Buff's gun. Then he went elsewhere. The cowboy did not go back into the saloon until he was out of sight.

There was more than admiration in Mrs. Fernie's handsome eyes when she again faced the bar and herself. She stretched a cool hand out to him.

"You certainly have the knack of coming at the right time," she said. "That

(Continued on Page 8.)

He seized her wrist and pulled her forward and partly across the bar.

The Weeper Sex

BY ARTEMUS CALLOWAY

"I'd like to know," said Aunt Jane, "how a woman who has been a faithful wife for fifteen years feels to sit idly by and see another woman take her husband." The worst of it was, Edith didn't know she was herself to blame!

AUNT JANE settled primly in the more-or-less comfortable porch rocker, eyed her companion for a moment, then allowed her gaze to wander to the moonlit lawn.

Far down in the valley there twinkled the lights of an occasional farmhouse, while still farther away a single light showed in the window of the railroad station which owed its existence largely to the fact that the little resort on the mountain did a thriving business during several months of the year.

Some small boys as they raced across the rolling lawn; the swish of a stone as it cut thru the branches of an oak, a yell—"You almost got that flying squirrel that time!"

Aunt Jane rose to her feet to deliver a severe lecture on cruelty to helpless animals, but was saved the trouble. The father of one of the lads gained the group and spoke quietly but effectively to his offspring. The youths scattered, and Aunt Jane knew that from that time on the queer little creature in the treetop was safe. She was a wise woman, was Aunt Jane, knowing full well the frailties of her kind, and realizing that, after all, but few are deliberately cruel—only thoughtless.

Again she seated herself, and again she glanced at the younger woman sitting only a few feet away. From the ballroom came the sound of music—music entirely unlike that to which Aunt Jane had danced in her youth. An elderly man sat at the farther end of the verandas engrossed in solitaire. From the lawn came snatches of low-toned conversation. Once or twice the girlish laugh. . . Shadowy figures moved about under the farther oaks.

And then Aunt Jane spoke. "Edith!"

The other woman turned. "Yes?"

Aunt Jane straightened slightly in her chair. "I've never interfered—for which I am sometimes thankful—but there is one thing I'd like to know."

"Yes?" Edith Armstrong's tone was quick, jerky, nervous.

"I'd like to know how a woman who has been a true, faithful wife for fifteen years—the mother of two lovely children—feels to sit idly by and see another woman take her husband."

Came a gasp from the younger woman. "Take her husband?"

"Yes." There was no hesitancy now. "Your husband."

"I don't understand."

"Hmph! You don't?"

"No-o."

Aunt Jane shrugged ever so slightly. "Then, I must say that your understanding needs attention. There's something about it that isn't working."

The little woman had, at times, been accused of lapsing into careless, if not slangy, speech, but this troubled her not at all. She knew what she wanted to say, and said it.

"Who?"

"Yes. I dare say there isn't another person here at Mountain Peak that hasn't noticed it long before now—and understood."

Mrs. Armstrong stiffened. "You mean Gerald—and Mrs. Mortimer?"

"Certainly. Hasn't he danced with her every night for the past two weeks?"

"I-e-es. But, Aunt Jane, you know I don't dance."

For perhaps ten seconds Aunt Jane remained silent. Then: "No. You don't. And haven't they strolled together all over this mountain? Haven't they climbed to the top of Eagle's Nest half a dozen or so times? And what about the picnic parties at the Falls? They've been together there, haven't they?"

Edith Armstrong fingered a dainty handkerchief. "Yes. But you know I don't care for that sort of thing. I—I'm—I haven't been very strong the past few years."

"That's true. But why?"

Edith sighed. "I don't know—exactly. The doctor says it's attention to household duties. Looking after Gerald and the children. He advises against overexertion."

"Advises quiet, eh?"

"Yes."

"Uh-huh!" One could have read a great deal in the exclamation. "And while you're keeping quiet the candle is burning brightly and the fool moth is drawing nearer and nearer. Quiet!"

THE music came to an abrupt halt. Then the customary clapping of hands . . . the mounting saxophone . . . notes of a more shrill instrument . . . the thump of the piano . . . the dance was on again.

But a few minutes later it ended. There was a rush for the veranda, and after a bit Gerald Armstrong and Louise Mortimer appeared. For a moment they stood at the edge of the veranda, talking. Once the pretty widow tapped Mrs. Armstrong's husband playfully with her fan. And finally they strolled down and joined Aunt Jane and Gerald's wife.

When they had found chairs Armstrong placed a hand on his wife's shoulder. "Sure the night air isn't harmful, dear?"

She shook her head. "No."

"You haven't been very strong lately. You know your head ached terribly this afternoon."

"It's perfectly all right now." There was ice in her tone, which even her husband couldn't fail to detect. And he wondered. This wasn't like Edith. What could have happened?

"Sure you feel all right?"

"Positive."

"But, o-oh, Mrs. Armstrong!" Mrs. Mortimer's voice reminded one of a silvery-toned, far-away bell. "I can't understand why you don't dance. Ger—Mr. Armstrong is a most wonderful partner. I'm sure it would do you worlds of good."

"I never cared for dancing." The chill was still there. And even she wondered at it. Never before had she felt this way about a woman—and her husband. But never before had Aunt Jane talked as she had tonight.

"Edith"—there was something a trifle out of the ordinary in Gerald's tone—"a party of us have planned a horseback ride to the Falls tomorrow morning. Don't you think you'd like to go?"

She shook her head. "I'm afraid I wouldn't be equal to it. And besides—I promised the children that tomorrow morning——"

"They'll excuse you," interrupted Aunt Jane. "They don't need you. There are plenty of children here for them to play with."

I know. But Gerald, Junior, wasn't looking at all well this afternoon."

"You spoil that boy to death." There was a tinge of impatience in her husband's voice.

Edith flushed. "I do not. I know a great deal more about the care of children than you do, Gerald. I know when they are not feeling well."

"If you didn't give them quite so much attention——"

It was then that the miserable wire barb again. Armstrong turned to Louise Mortimer. "I believe you promised me this one."

For a moment she hesitated. "But if

They were within twenty feet of Gerald Armstrong and Louise Mortimer when Edith saw them. . . . She smothered a little cry.

Mrs. Armstrong isn't feeling well, perhaps——"

Edith never knew how she managed to force a smile, but she did. "I feel quite all right, thank you. And I don't mind being left at all. As a matter of fact, I prefer it."

It was out. She would have given much to recall the words, but it was too late. And then her husband and the woman she hated were gone.

"She is a cat!" the miserable wife half whispered.

But Aunt Jane shook her head. "Gerald doesn't seem to find her so."

There was more than the threat of a sob in Mrs. Armstrong's voice. "I wish you would stop linking their names together."

Aunt Jane arched eyebrows. "My dear child, I don't."

"You do! You can't speak of one without mentioning the other."

"But I do not link their names together. They do that themselves—by their actions."

There were tears in Edith's eyes. "I'm going to retire. My head is hurting again."

The older woman nodded. "Going to bed—to cry, to weep. Well, our sex may be the weaker one, as has often been claimed, but women like you, my dear, make me feel that you should be designated differently — the 'weeper' sex. That fits you. You make yourself an unfit companion for a real, live man, a man with red blood in his veins—and then you weep because a woman as thoroly alive as himself comes along and takes him . . . Huh!"

Edith appeared deaf to her words, but this was only for effect. Long after she retired she lay thinking. Aunt Jane's conversation had been disquieting. She wondered . . . She had not danced in years. Had never ridden. Walked but little. She cared nothing for bridge. Teas for man-long. Her home, husband and children had been her world. She had always done her duty as a wife and mother. She had tried to make Gerald comfortable—and happy. And had succeeded. He had never paid attentions to another woman—until now.

DURING the past winter they had met Mrs. Mortimer. The woman was, at that time, visiting friends in the city the Armstrongs called home. She was attractive; a bit bold, perhaps, but the sort that, according to Aunt Jane, "can get away with anything." And at that time Gerald had, seemingly, noticed her but little.

Whether or not Mrs. Mortimer had money no one seemed to know. She always dressed well. There had been whispers of one or two cases of breach of promise that never reached the courts. . . . The hint that she lived by her wits. But nevertheless she, somehow, managed to hold on. One of those rare cases where whispers of possible evil appear to do the subject more good than harm.

Mrs. Mortimer had remained in the city only a few days. Then she departed—and was practically forgotten. Then the Armstrongs decided to spend their vacation at Mountain Peak. It was quiet, restful, and Edith needed rest. Gerald had readily agreed. He liked this sort of place; had always detested the more crowded resorts; the pretense. So they had come. And with them—Aunt Jane. "I'll help Edith look after the children," she had said.

From the beginning Armstrong had liked Mountain Peak. He had been able to forget, for the time being, his successful wholesale lumber business. Wondered how he had ever spent a vacation at the gayer resorts. Thanked his good fortune at being spared contact with the fleshy, overdressed women who went there to show their jewels. Felt relieved when he met no men who wanted to tell him of the money they had made on certain deals. And then wondered how long it would be before that element arrived—and ruined—this ideal mountain place.

At first Edith Armstrong had been as much in love with Mountain Peak as was her husband. She liked all the women folks—and that included Mrs. Mortimer. Why that woman had to come there Edith couldn't understand. And then almost the day after her arrival Louise Mortimer monopolized Gerald. Edith found herself wondering if they hadn't been more friendly during the past winter than had been apparent. . . . Edith knew that Gerald had at one time danced, but she had never dreamed that it meant so much to him. He had practically quit because she didn't care for it. Of course he had a great deal to learn; wasn't familiar with the new dances, but under Mrs. Mortimer's tutelage he proved an apt pupil.

But, still, in the beginning Edith hadn't exactly worried. There had been that vague something that she didn't understand, but she had made no attempt to analyze her feelings. But tonight—Aunt Jane's words . . . And for the first time she noticed how the pretty widow smiled on Gerald.

"She's younger than I." Edith told herself. "Three or four years younger—and because of her carefree life doesn't look nearly as old as she really is. While I look older than I am."

This was not calculated to do an aching

She Wasn't a Princess

BY LAURA REID MONTGOMERY

TOM'S blue eyes twinkled with pleasure as he climbed the shabby steps of the boarding-house. May, altho a recent acquaintance, had become very dear to him and he patted, a bit self-consciously, the pocket that held a little pearl ring in a box covered with a silky paper that looked almost like satin. "She'll sure look lovely in a bright pink morning apron with her yellow curls fluffing out around her face," he thought, reddening at his bold look into the future.

Several of the young people at May's boarding place were going to the annual dance given by the plumbers and Tom nodded greetings to the pair coming down the steps.

"Doesn't Amy look like a queen?" demanded Harold gaily.

Amy tilted her head saucily and held her small figure stiffly that he might notice the new blue suit and frilly blouse.

"She certainly does, I like a plain suit like that. Is Miss Smith ready?"

"Her door was locked," explained Amy, looking rather puzzled, "but the landlady says she has a wonderful gown for the dance."

"You're supposing a good deal," she returned nervously and her odd manner did not fail to be noticed by the downcast young fellow.

At the big, dusty hall where the plumbers thronged, each with his best girl clinging to his brawny arm, May made a great sensation. There were, naturally many evening gowns, also many inexpensive thin frocks and hundreds of coat-suits, but there was no other grown-up bizzarre as that worn by the little clerk and comments floated in the wake of the flaming fan.

Tom found himself besieged with men desirous of trading dances so he and May were not long without partners.

"Some girl you brought, Blake," laughed a burly voice, "some one told me you were as good as engaged to a nice little girl who sold ribbons."

Tom angrily pushed down the box in his pocket; his purchase had been premature for he had no idea of marrying a fashion-plate who would spend his savings upon gold laces and feathers.

When the supper dance was beginning May looked up timidly: "Mad about something, Tom?"

A plainly dressed man was watching the pair from the end of the hall and he approached and jostled the girl rudely.

"Look out where you're going," growled Tom and his hand shot out and covered the fist of the stranger, "give it up."

The stranger grinned and opened his coat. "Sorry, but it's all in the day's work. Slick Sue has been keeping kinda quiet lately but I know her ways. This," he opened his fist enough to permit a gleam of gold to escape, "is favorite hiding place of hers for her loot."

Tom had gone white at sight of the man's star and he flung around to May. Just in time to catch her as she fainted.

"Slick Sue," repeated Tom dully, his eyes on the sweet little heart-shaped face and the babyish fluff of yellow curls. "Slick Sue."

"Known her long?" demanded the plain-clothes man as they waited in the cloak-room for May to recover.

"There's some terrible mistake. She's a ribbon clerk at——"

There was a certain pity in the smooth face opposite. "A ribbon clerk wearing a dress like that? That fan alone cost more than she'd earn in two months. Want to go to the station with her?"

"The station?" May's eyes were wide with panic as she wiped away rain-water the maid had dashed upon her, "this gown wasn't stolen, I thought it was awfully cheap——"

The officer eyed her: "How do you mean cheap? Better own up, Slick Sue, maybe the judge will let you off easy if——"

"I'm May Smith," sobbed the girl, "and I bought this gown and cape with the fan from a second-hand store. I——unfortunately her eyes sought Tom's—"wanted to look especially nice tonight—like a city girl but I haven't had a good time at all. My folks are not rich," scarlet flamed in her white cheeks as she recalled Tom's questions, "and——"

May's story was found to be true—indeed, her amazement when the gilt tassel was opened and a diamond pendant hidden in the head of it revealed, was so naive that even the officer was impressed—and at last Tom was permitted to take her home to the boarding-house.

"Some pal double-crossed Slick Sue and sold her old clothes. I didn't believe the story but the bit of ice in the tassel proves it. She used to mingle with the dance crowds and I'd find a good chance, hide it in one of the tassels. Musta made her getaway so fast she couldn't stop to get it. Kinda sorry, too."

"I—was so anxious to look nice," sobbed May as they went up the street—"I wore that last time I wished so I could buy the frock; I thought——"

"A fellow doesn't care to see his girl tricked out like a circus actress, not the he wants for his wife," returned Tom, the old twinkle of pleasure returning to his blue eyes, "but I'm glad you did, little culprit who had played at being a rich girl with such disastrous results. I——bought a pearl ring tonight but when I saw such a fashionable creature, I decided to keep it for a wife who would care less for appearances and a kitchenette apartment in that new honeymoon building——"

"Oh, Tom!" the wide eyes sparkled thru the tears and a tiny hand clutched the big coat sleeve, "a pearl ring? Let me see it, please."

"You really want to see it? It looks kind of cheap beside your fine feathers."

"Oh, don't!" tease me. It was all such a horrid mistake—my getting a gown fit for a princess."

"And you're no princess in disguise? Just May Smith?"

"I'd rather be plain May Smith than any princess——"

"Sorry you're so fond of the name of Smith—had a notion I could get you to change it——"

She nodded: "I shall be May Blake, Smith that was," she whispered.

"I mean," she interrupted, "that I'm thru. . . . I saw you——"

head any particular good, so when Gerald came in to tell her good night she was really suffering—and denied it.

Next morning, from her window, she watched the riders depart. Mrs. Mortimer made a striking picture in riding togs. For the first time in her life Edith Armstrong really hated a person. Especially when she noticed how Gerald appeared to be hanging on the other woman's words. Her Gerald! How dare any woman? She wouldn't stand for it. He was hers. Never before had he seemed so straight, so broad-shouldered. Never before had she so admired his black hair; truly a handsome man—a man that any woman might care for. But Louise Mortimer was a fine-looking woman, a striking type. The sun brought out all the golden beauty of her luxuriant bobbed shock. She wouldn't mind her age, her girl-like complexion. Edith felt suddenly faint.

That night there was a moonlight picnic at Cliff Rock, a beautiful spot overlooking the valley. Edith didn't feel like going, and Gerald insisted on remaining with her. Somehow this touched Mrs. Armstrong as nothing else could have done. He did care for her; the other woman meant nothing to him.

"And, dear," his voice was delicious, "you haven't cared because I danced with Mrs. Mortimer."

Edith's thought changed like lightning. She saw, in this, but one thing: A guilty conscience. Fear that she had noticed.

The devil's own rage filled Edith within. Scarcely knowing what she she did she drew herself erect. Her dark-brown eyes flashed—she had never looked in the effort to suppress the rage that gripped her. "Care?" she laughed bitterly. "Care? Flatter yourself, I don't care what you do."

"Now—now—dear, I never dreamed you were—could be—jealous."

For a moment she saw him thru the eyes of a mad woman. She bit her lip until the blood came; she never realized that her nails cut into the tender, pink flesh of her hands. And then she laughed. It was so taunting that no woman should utter. It was a laugh that no woman wants to utter. In it was despair . . . a hint of mad that had been touched.

"Jealous!" she half-shrieked. "Jealous—of you? As if I could be! O-oh! O-oh! So you think I'd allow myself to worry over any man that wants to make a fool of himself? Jealous! Gerald, you amuse me."

Suddenly she swayed, and if he hadn't caught her in his arms would have fallen to the floor. When next Edith opened her eyes she was on her bed, Gerald beside her.

She noticed how pale his face was, the worried expression in his eyes, and immediately felt very sorry for what she had said. "I—I fainted, didn't I?"

He nodded. "Yes, dear. But don't try to talk."

"I'm all right now. And I'm sorry for what I said. It was foolish of me. I was nervous. My head——"

He took her hand in his. "I know, dear. And I really feel if you would mix with other people more——"

"But dear, I don't feel like doing those things. At home I've been so busy. And here I want to rest."

Gerald nodded. "I know. But there are various ways by which one may rest."

She forced a smile. "But I want quiet. And I want you to forget the terrible way I acted. Of course I'm jealous. I know that you care for me. And I don't mind if you dance with Mrs. Mortimer."

"You don't mind?" There was the hint of something vague, something that made Edith glance suddenly at her husband's face.

What she saw there reassured her. "No. I know I can trust you."

His grip tightened on her hand; he leaned forward—their lips met. And for the first time in weeks Edith felt at peace with the world.

GERALD didn't go with the picnic party, but on the following night he danced with Louise Mortimer. And the following day a picnic was made up to go to the Falls.

"Can't you go, dear?"

Edith shook her head at her husband's question. "I told the children I would read to them this morning."

"And—Thelma and Fred?"

"But I promised. A mother's duty is to her family." She smiled. "You may not need me just at this time, but the children do."

It was shortly after dinner that Gerald told his wife of the near-accident at the Falls. "Louise came near falling off a rock overlooking the pool at the foot of the falls. It would have meant a terrible death."

"Louise? Who is Louise?"

He blushed. "Why—Mrs. Mortimer." She tensed. "Rather familiar—Louise—isn't it?"

Gerald attempted an indifferent shrug. "Oh! That's nothing. Most of the women call her that. I've heard the name so much that I've just seemed natural."

Again that dangerous light in her eyes. "Indeed! Natural—Oh, well. I'm glad she didn't fall. I suppose you happened to be near and caught her?"

She knew, without his answer, that this was true. And knew, that for the moment at least, she was not glad the other woman didn't fall.

For a day Gerald kept away from Mrs. Mortimer. And somehow Edith was happier than she had been in a long time. She realized now, more than ever, that despite what she had told *her* husband that she did resent this dancing with Mrs. Mortimer, that she was jealous. And now, perhaps, the affair—if affair it had really been—was over.

It was late afternoon when she joined Aunt Jane on the verandа. One other woman greeted her with a smile. "Let's go for a little stroll thru the woods. We won't go far. Surely you are as good a walker as your old aunt."

For a moment Edith hesitated. "Seen Gerald lately?"

"He was around hefe a while ago——"

"All right. I'll go with you."

The woods near the hotel were pretty. The honeysuckle vines in blood—the dogwood. A redbird called to its mate.

They were within twenty feet of Gerald Armstrong and Louise Mortimer when Edith saw them. She came to a sudden halt, smothered a little cry—drew back, pulling Aunt Jane with her, and not until they were near the hotel did she speak.

"The—the—had her arm across Gerald's shoulder. Gazing into his eyes like [illegible]——"

"And I don't think," said Aunt Jane calmly, "that he was struggling to get away. Now—what are you going to do?"

"Divorce him, of course!" The words were sharp as a dagger. "She can have him."

Aunt Jane said nothing.

Gerald found his wife in her room. Swollen eyes told that she had been crying. "I'm returning to the city tomorrow morning," she told him. "And I'm taking the children with me."

He started. "Yes? You are not feeling well? Have you seen the hotel doctor?"

"No. And I'll not see him. I don't need a doctor. I never felt better in my life," she lied.

He shrugged. "All right. But I didn't dream you were ready to leave yet. I'll get our things ready."

"You needn't mind. I'll attend to my things—mine and the children's. Aunt Jane will go with me."

"But, dear——"

"But, dear——nothing— You'll hear from me later."

"Of course I'm going with you."

She threw her head back. "You are not! Nor any other time. Your Louise can have you!"

"You don't mean——"

"I mean," she interrupted, "that I am thru. I shall enter suit for divorce at once. Now——"

She indicated the door. "Saw you—and that woman—this afternoon——"

There was more than a suggestion of hysteria in her tone: "And I've been a fool—a blind fool. It isn't the woman who is the mother of your children, the woman that has spent years trying to make you comfortable, that you want—it's a woman who steals other women's husbands!"

There was something in his face that hushed her. She voiced his own eyes, when he spoke. "Just a minute—Edith. You have made every effort to make me comfortable; there's no denying that. But did it ever occur to you that I might want a congenial companion? Has it never occurred to you that I may have married you for something more than comfort? I was fairly well fixed financially when we married; I could buy all the comforts you mention. But hotels,

(Continued on Page 16.)

"Hot dog," laughed Tom, wondering what the young manager could achieve on her salary of ten-fifty a week in the department store.

There was a cessation of conversation when at last May descended the staircase, swept down would better describe her movements.

A cape of gold lace, boasting many ruffles, was tightly wrapped about her slim form but the frail laces permitted entrancing glimpses of a sheath gown that fairly dripped with lengths of glittering beads. Tassels of gold swung out unexpectedly as she stepped down unsteadily upon the French-heeled slippers and she held a fan of flame-tinted feathers in her left hand.

Tom's genial expression vanished: mutely he gazed upon the smart, plain little blue suit of Amy with the amazing luxury of the blue-eyed young person who dimpled up at him for the approval he failed to bestow. Amy earned twenty-five dollars a week.

"Oh, hello," he responded tardily to May's greeting, "all ready, I see."

The radiance faded from the girl's blue eyes and she sedately accompanied him from the dingy hall.

"You always lived at home until you came to Chicago to take this job?"

May nodded.

"I suppose you brought quite a bit of money from home?" went on Tom coldly.

May's quick temper flamed in her eyes. "I don't know that it concerns you, Tom Blake, but I didn't. I live on my salary without any help from dad."

"I'd like to meet your people. Here, I suppose?"

THEY WHO TOUCH FIRE

By H. Walbridge Dudley

NO MAN can rightly say from what quarter peril may approach. The staid burgher bound for business of a morning has been crushed flat by a tumbling cornice. The man of means and position may prove a glittering sham, his sudden departure leaving consternation and disaster in its wake. The good name of yesterday may well be the mock of this morning's trumpet-ing press.

And not the least curious quality of these evil manifestations is the shocking suddenness with which they have been known to smite the unwary; their beginnings, as in this case, being often of the most casual nature.

The play had been a marked success. In the outer lobby two men had drawn aside from the drift of the outward bound audience. Emerging from a struggle with his great-coat, Bradford Ames, the Third, cast a quick eye across the shifting crowd.

"Let's step back here," he suggested, "and let the crowd pass, Bendigo. See theirs, isn't that Mr. Rotherwaite over —in Heaven's name, who is that little stunner just behind Mrs. Rotherwaite?"

His friend's glance roved across the silks and satins, the gray heads and the boyish bobs, the—he stiffened slightly. "I didn't know you were so susceptible to blondes," he smiled.

"Blondes!" snorted Ames. "Blondes, my eye! The girl's a wonder!"

Bendigo began drifting toward the street. "Well," he agreed, "she is rather a wonder at that—in more ways than one. I'll tell you something about her." He raised his stick to a prowling taxi. The cab slid to the curb, the door slammed, and the machine darted away toward Longacre Square.

* * * * *

There is an ordered hurry, a sort of subdued expectancy, if you please, about the departure of a fast continental train. Even Ames felt it, standing there on the platform, and rubbed the warm air with his hand to glance at his watch. He could hear, very faintly, the roar of the subway as a shuttle train rushed into Grand Central. Little motor trucks, piled high with baggage, scuttered past, interspersed with red-capped porters, and a miscellany of travelers, while the low concrete arches multiplied the ordered bustle of departure. One of the black-mouthed tunnels far ahead had already regurgitated the first section of the Chicago Limited. His would follow within a few minutes.

As he turned in his final stroll along the long platform two porters bearing a quantity of smart impedimenta trotted past. A moment later there was a light and leisurely step behind him, and a slender, graceful, decidedly modish young woman went by. Ames was struck by something indefinably familiar in the delicate turn of her cheek.

Just then the porter of his own car took her hat box from one of the red caps, and she vanished. In a few moments Ames followed, exchanged his hat for the cap hanging in his compartment, and strolled forward to the club car. It harbored the usual early scattering of men, and he sought a chair at the far end.

Some one stumbled against his knee. His annoyed upward glance met such an engaging grin, such a pleasant apology from the sandy-haired young man, that annoyance was replaced by a smile, and the two later fell into casual talk, thru which the undertone of the wheels droned monotonously with its eternal clickety-clack, clickety-clack, clickety-clack, clickety-clack.

Dining early and alone, Ames had written his order. Beyond the glass the dark fields flickered swiftly past, like scenes from a worn cinematograph film. Yet the glitter within the diner made mirrors of the windows, and it was there, in reflection, that Ames caught his next glimpse of his acquaintance of the afternoon.

"Shall I be intruding?"

"Not at all," nodded Ames. "Sit down. Glad to have you."

During the meal they exchanged names, and later, cards. The blond giant was, it appeared, a Ryall Weed, engineer, originally of Baltimore; but lately, due to the roving nature of his professional endeavors, something of a citizen at large.

"One must be here, there and everywhere, don't you know," volunteered Mr. Weed.

"I dare say," agreed Ames passively.

"Oh, yes, as a matter of fact, I——"

Ames glanced up to find the other's face suffused with an expression of glad surprise, his eyes fixed on a point directly above Ames' right shoulder.

Mr. Weed rose to his feet.

"Well, well," he smiled, "this is certainly delightful. It's years since I've seen you, Constance. Years, positively."

From the corner of his eye, Ames watched a slender, ungloved hand appear and rest for a moment in Weed's brawny fist. He caught the faintest odor, vaguely reminiscent of pine needles, or was it tea roses? He heard a delightfully modulated, soft, sweet voice say: "This is nice, Ryall. I shall be in the observation car after dinner. Do come back."

As the girl moved sway Mr. Weed returned to his chair.

"Old friend," he announced smilingly. "Must present you later."

At that moment the girl turned to take her seat, several tables distant. Ames' eyes widened with sudden interest. There, facing him, was the lovely lady of the theater lobby, the rose velvet opera cloak—Bendigo's friend.

After dinner, where Weed proved to be an adept juggler of conversational small change, Ames was presented.

"How nice, how very, very nice," smiled the girl, "to know you, Mr. Ames. I shall have two squires now—at least as far as Chicago."

"You go further, then?"

She made a tiny moue. "Yes, indeed. Clear out to San Diego. Isn't it dreadful? My Aunt Jo, you know."

"Coronado?"

She nodded brightly.

"Well, well," put in Weed, in his suave, pleasant voice, "that certainly is the best of news, Constance. Business—that implacable master—is taking me direct to Kansas City."

"Why, this just splendid, Ryall," she returned, clapping her hands softly. "I'm too surprised for words."

Miss Drew uncrossed slim ankles.

"I begin to think, Miss Drew," volunteered Ames, smiling, "that I am among the most fortunate of men. I am bound direct for the coast, for Pasadena, myself."

She turned to him, amazement in her blue eyes.

"Really? That is nice, Mr. Ames," she acknowledged at length. "I, too, am fortunate."

"The world," announced Mr. Weed, heavily, "proves rather a pleasant place."

Miss Drew uncrossed slim ankles. "Do you know, Mr. Ames, there was some difficulty about my compartment west from Chicago, and I may have to take just a berth. Naturally I'd rather not. Much rather. Now, do you think it would be wise to—wire ahead, wire to Chicago?"

"By all means," nodded Ames. "Here" —he reached into his pocket—"here is my transportation. Let see! I am in—car two hundred and four, compartment E. Why not have the porter send a telegram from Cleveland?"

She leaned forward to study the ticket, surrounding him with an impalpable veil of fragrance—that evanescent, illusive odor of tea roses. The delicate curve of her cheek melted deliciously into the graceful sweep of neck and shoulder. Her ear—just then she turned still more, looked up at him, blue eyes dusky violet—"Please, Mr. Ames," she appealed, "please—would it be too much trouble —would you be sweet enough to wire ahead for me —telegraph to Chicago? Then I know so much more about these things."

"A good idea—excellent!" interjected Mr. Weed. "Shall I get blanks?"

The train swayed lightly in a long curve. Miss Drew leaned back in her chair, her eyes still attentive to Ames' face. He felt a trifle dizzy, as if he had been partially lifted from his chest.

"Why, of course—of course," he agreed hastily. "Just pardon me a moment."

From the tiny desk at the forward end of the car, he gazed an instant at the rushing night beyond the window, then wrote two telegrams rapidly. The second read:

"Kindly reserve extra compartment Los Angeles Limited tomorrow stop Transportation already purchased stop Bradford Ames."

The first telegram he folded quickly and thrust into his side pocket. With the second in hand he returned to the chair, handed the yellow slip to the lovely Miss Drew with a little bow.

"I believe this will serve."

She glanced thru it, and acquiesced with a breath-taking smile. "Oh, yes, indeed. That is quite, quite perfect, I'm sure." She reached across the arm of her lounge chair, pressed the porter's call bell. "You are really more than kind."

Seeking his chair Ames tucked the yellow paper into his pocket. The porter shuffled down the aisle, stood before them. Ames unwrapped a bill in the telegram. The porter beamed, touched his cap with deep respect and ambled away.

From this little byplay Ames turned with a smile.

"Yes," he agreed cordially, "that particular wire will be helpful to—you," with the faintest possible emphasis on the last word.

The girl, it seemed to him, was so entirely charming. And so utterly unconscious, apparently, of her own power. So confiding, so naive. Really quite a wonderful young person, this little Miss Constance Drew. Perhaps it was just as well, Ames reflected, that she had not chanced to see the telegram he had actually given the porter.

He arose and bade her a courteous good-night. Mr. Weed rose at his elbow, and, with an airy word, followed suit.

"Constance Drew regarded their retreating backs thoughtfully. "The complete darling!" she whispered. "The poor, half-witted fish!"

These somewhat ambiguous statements were completely lost in the continuous, monotonous noise of the train fleeing westward into the night: clickety-clack, clickety-clack, clickety-clack.

The three expended a goodly portion of the time between trains next day skidding about in the slush on pavements that glistened with rain.

Chicago's towers were curtained by a dripping fog. As early darkness fell, turning the crowded streets into a study in gray, the bobbing faces like dabs of color on a Corot, Ames said:

The lights of South Michigan street glowed dimly thru the mist, and Ames laughingly compared it all to London. Constance Drew sprang swiftly to the defense.

"You know London, then?" asked Ames.

"Oh, yes," she acknowledged. "At least as well as Chicago; perhaps a wee bit better."

Just then the cab halted for a moment near a street lamp, and the girl's face emerged cameo-clear from the gloom. Her eyes were shadowed, but there was a wistful, a youthful delicacy to the slender nostrils, the pouting lips, that proved decidedly distracting.

They rattled across Van Buren street, with the roar of the elevated overhead, and drove into the motor entrance of the La Salle street station. As Ames left the driver, Ames turned his hawklike face to the girl, who stood, muffled to her chin, just within the swinging doors.

"By the way," he said casually, "I didn't notice what car they put you in."

She opened her purse and handed Ames a little white envelope. "There it is," she smiled. "I didn't notice, either."

Ames scanned it. "Why, this is splendid," he answered. "Car two hundred and four. Bless me, they've given you compartment E—right beside mine!"

Before she could answer Weed came swaggering up, and Ames went off in search of porters to collect their hand luggage.

Directly after dinner that evening Weed excused himself and the others chatted in the observation car, or strolled thru the train. Once, as they stood for a time on one of the shut-in platforms, the train lurched and she almost fell. Ames caught her, supported her yielding body for an instant, and was smitten once more by the faint, seductive odor of tea roses, which clung to her hair.

He bade Weed good-by at Kansas City next morning and watched him vanish up the hill, panting enormous cubanese building of some automobile school. During the few moments before the train went on he walked briskly up and down the platform, glad of the opportunity

"Who is that little stunner just behind Mrs. Rotherwaite?"

for exercise, as the morning was crisp and fine.

Later, at breakfast, he was a trifle startled when she slipped into the chair opposite with a vivid flush. He noticed that several of their fellow passengers eyed them with interest, and he found trouble in repressing a smile at their obvious inference, especially as she wore no rings of any kind, no jewelry at all, except a beautiful thin bracelet set solidly with alternate square diamonds and sapphires. She was as fresh and vivid as some dainty flower. Her loose sport suit of gray-mixed homespun, her little gray felt hat, topped off by a jaunty feather, did nothing to detract from the effect.

Amos glanced soberly down at his own dark clothes, then up into her laughing eyes.

"It seems to me," he smiled, "that I'm a rather drab person to squire such a vision of loveliness."

She laughed delightedly.

"I didn't think you were susceptible to a wee blonde person like me. I'd rather imagined you a sort of animated Rock of Gibraltar!"

Amos gazed at her thoughtfully. This new generation, he reflected, certainly did the craziest things. Here, as far as externals went, was an obviously dainty and well-bred girl, eating breakfasting with him, with complete unconcern, but actually goading him into a flirtation.

She interrupted his reverie prosaically enough. "Eat your bacon," she ordered. "It's getting cold."

After breakfast they read the Kansas City papers and then played Mah Jongg for a while in her compartment. He was amused by her ready acceptance of such an intimate basis. The absence of protest on the part of the porter surprised him, and he momentarily expected a knock on the compartment door; but the morning passed without interruption, and it was only later that the explanation occurred. The conductor, of course, had the compartment charted, but the porter, seeing them constantly together, indulged in a perfectly natural assumption.

That afternoon they sat for a time of the glassed-in observation platform listening to the monotonous, interminable, clickety-clack, clickety-clack of the wheels.

The landscape fled past, a continuous panorama of soaked brown fields with an occasional patch of snow in some sheltered hollow, looking like a soiled table cloth left by thoughtless picnickers. Occasionally the train thundered thru some prairie town, giving them a flashing glimpse of muddy streets, women with turned up skirts hanging out newly washed garments, and a main street where life was momentarily arrested to watch the limited pass thru.

When Constance Drew left him to "doss a trifle," as she put it, Amos remained on the platform for some time. Occasionally he ran a meditative finger along his high Roman nose, and his thin lips curled in a vague, decidedly unpleasant smile.

At length he rose and spoke aloud. "Tonight's the night."

An old gentleman in a plaid cap, the only other occupant of the platform, looked up in startled fashion at the closing door as Amos disappeared within.

A white uniformed waiter came along the corridor with his sing-song; "second call for dinner—dinner now being served in the dining car forward—second call for dinner!" when Amos finally took his cigar from his mouth, tossed aside a magazine, and knocked on the thin wood partition between his room and Constance Drew's. The car was almost deserted.

"Almost ready?" he called.

"Practically," she answered. "You may come in now if you like."

He went out into the corridor; turned into her compartment. She was lounging gracefully in the corner wrapped in her long cloak.

"Shall we have dinner now?" he inquired.

"Sit down, Mr. Amos, I want to talk with you. But shut the door first. Thanks."

"But my dear Miss Drew, why not at dinner?" he questioned smiling.

"For several reasons. First," she answered decidedly, "because nearly everything I have on beneath this coat is rather torn and disarranged."

Amos stared at her, as she loosened her cloak slightly and revealed a white shoulder.

"But for Heaven's sake, what has——"

"Nothing — yet," she acknowledged quietly.

Amos sprang to his feet.

"Sit down or I'll scream!" she whispered. "Ah, that's better."

"So that's the game!" said Amos softly, the the temple veins in his hawk face were humming.

She re:med to relax a trifle.

"May I put it this way?" she suggested. "First, there was the telegram sent from Cleveland reserving this compartment, and signed with your name. You know that the conductor could secure a copy from either the railroad or telegraph company."

Her innocent blue eyes were entirely guileless as she searched his face.

He nodded dumbly.

"Second, Mr. Bradford Amos is rather well known in social and industrial circles and a scandal just at this time would be—most unfortunate. You say?"

"For Mr. Amos!" he questioned. "Yes, most unfortunate."

She glanced at him curiously for a moment, and went on:

"Quite like from your liability under your telegram, and my occupancy of the room next to yours, I may start screaming presently, drop this cloak"—she let it slip again—"and dash into the corridor."

"Quite so!" acknowledged Amos grimly. "There are one or two little points you haven't mentioned, such as your knowledge that this car is deserted except for ourselves at the moment, but I dare say you haven't overlooked anything."

"Oh, no, dear Mr. Amos, not the smallest trifle."

(Continued on Page 16.)

Scream your head off, darling, for all I care.

The Twisted Foot

(Continued From Page 4.)

Chaves animal is a dirty little rat. He had me so I couldn't reach the gun in the drawer. Shake."

He shook and smiled upon her. Yet he withdrew his fingers from her clasp sooner than she would have wished. Almost any other man of the neighborhood would have proved more complaisant. For Lil Perrie was a widow with all a widow's ways, a figure, a gorgeous mop of red hair, her own complexion, and a temper which she was clever enough as a rule to ride on the curb. Besides being a fairly good business woman, except upon those rare occasions when her rather ardent heart dictated to her otherwise cool head, she knew what was what and on which side her bread was buttered. It may be said that since her husband's demise she had prospered amazingly. It was this attractive person then, who had just given Chaves to Buff, and now pushed the customary bottle across to the table at the bar. "Have one with me!" Buff invited politely.

"A short beer, if you don't mind," replied the lady and drew one that was brilliantly amber.

"How," intoned Buff, completing the ritual by looking at Lil over the rim of his glass.

"How," cooed she, and tossed off her drink at one swallow.

"Have another," asked Buff.

"One is my limit. Take your hand out of your pocket. It's all on the house. You can't afford a dime in here today. You have another."

So Buff had another but refused a third. "One's my limit," said he with a grin. "I know when to stop."

The lady smiled and reached for the bottle in a way foreshadowing that her wrist touched Buff's. Her fluffy hand where it rested on the bar—touched the sawdust floor. Beating instant. Altho Lil had never before recorded him such an attention, Buff ordinarily would have been the last in the world enough to have played up properly to turning over his hand and grasping the lady's fingers. He was handsome as any one could wish. But now he hardly noticed the incident. He was too busy thinking about the pretty girl with amber eyes and honey-colored hair. Lil was piqued. This did not fit in with a plan of her own. She had not been flirting with for some time, but about which she had not been able to definitely make up her mind. Buff's excellent handling of the Chaves incident had crystallized flirtation into decision. A little scandal between her loyal brows. The unconscious Buff turned to go. The line was ironed out as if by magic.

"Don't go," she said softly, she. "You're not in a hurry, are you?"

"Not especially," replied Buff, turning back.

"I want to talk to you," she told him, her lips curving in an appealing smile. "I'm lonely."

"Are you?"

"I am. You can't imagine how lonely it is for a widow."

"That's sure tough," said Buff, experiencing a vague unease.

"I don't suppose you could," pursued the lady, her handsome eyes languishing at him.

"You can easy get another bartender." "I don't mean a bartender. I mean a man—like—like my husband."

"You'll travel a long way before you find somebody like him. He was a fine fellah."

"He was," sighed the widow, her eyes demurely downcast. Slowly she raised them and transfixed Buff with a warm stare. "There others."

"I guess there are," admitted Buff. "Well, I must be going."

"Oh, Buff, wait a minute. There's something I want you to do for me out back."

"Well——"

"Don't you want to help me?" she asked, plaintively.

"Why, sure," assented Buff. "Lead me to it."

Lil literally did this when she had closed and locked the street door. She took Buff's hand in her own warm clasp and led him into her private apartment at the south end of the saloon. Buff did not acquire the slightest kick from this hand-holding, but he felt that it would have been rude to withdraw his fingers. He was never one to wittingly tease or annoy a woman. After all, it was only Lil, a good friend of his. He had known her ever since his coming to the country.

Buff stood aghast in amazement when he entered Lil's sitting-room. To his bunk-house eyes the room was luxurious. Certainly the time and place, it was. On the floor were Jicarilla blankets, fantastic and beautiful. Runnerwise across the table in the center of the room were Sioux saddle pockets of buckskin with fringe ten inches long. On the saddle pockets stood a large nickel-plated lamp with a green-ribbed shade. Ornamenting one end of the table was a buffalo-hunter's knife in a beaded, embroidered and fringed broad scabbard, the kind of scabbard that is worn inside the belt. On the other end of the table were an ash receiver and the Rocky Mountain News. Beside the table was an armed chair of the heavy southwestern model, its stretch-leathers made of bridle reins an inch wide. Across the room at one of the windows was another similar army chair. In front of the other window was a couch covered with a Hopi blanket. Heavy white curtains covered the windows. On three walls were hung exquisite specimens of Jicarilla saddle blankets. Three large Navajo blankets covered the fourth and end wall from floor to ceiling. There were no pictures. There was not even a mirror. It was essentially a man's room.

"Sit down over there," said Lil, releasing Buff's hand and indicating the couch. "I'll be back in a minute."

She pulled aside the central blanket of the three covering the end wall, and Buff saw a narrow door-like doorway giving into another room. When she let the blanket fall behind her, no one would have imagined that the wall was not solid.

Lil reappeared within the minute bearing a box which contained a sack of tobacco, matches and cigarette papers. Buff didn't know there was a room like this in the whole territory," said Buff.

"You like it?" she asked, offering the bowl containing the smoker's materials.

He helped himself and seated himself beside him on the couch with, however, the bowl between them.

"Make me a cigarette," he directed, leaning back and crossing her legs.

When he held out the open roll for her to lick, she noticed for the first not her pink tongue and ran it along the edge. She sank slowly back, on her face that of the man who had established Old Da Vinci painted into the face of Mona Lisa. Buff contrasted it as a smile and smiled back. He rolled the paper and handed her the finished cigarette.

"Thanks," she said. "Now roll yours."

He obeyed, and she returned him how two cigarettes may be lit with one match. When the girl attracts you, this bit of business is not without interest. When the girl does not, it is silly. Buff thought it silly. He began to be a little bored.

"What did you want me to do for you?" he asked, inspecting the glowing end of his cigarette.

"I'll tell you in a moment," said she. "Why, aren't you comfortable?"

"Oh, I'm that all right——"

"Do you think it's kind to run away the moment you come in?" pouted the spider to the fly.

"I ain't running away," denied the fly. "I'm staying right here, only if you've got anything you want me to do the sooner I do it, the sooner it will be done."

"You're very thoughtful," the lady. "That rule applies to almost anything, doesn't it?" So saying, she removed the bowl that she had been using and edged closer to her prey. "Buff," said she, bending forward so that she could look into his face, "I wonder just how much you'd do for—for the person you loved?"

Buff nervously shuffled his feet. He cleared his throat. He grew red. "I—uh—I dunno. I never thought about it."

She regarded him a moment in silence. It struck him that her eyes were a queer gray-green, not the gray-green of water, but the gray-green of rock. What a lay beneath their lashes he could not tell. But he knew that whatever it was he did not like it. Then quite suddenly the hard stare softened. The eyes became mild and luminous and most appealing. Her red lips smiled at him winsomely. She remained leaning forward. Her eyes continued to hold him. She made a gesture with her right hand.

"You said you liked all these things—this room?" she queried.

"Sure do."

She dropped her hand on his knee. "And me? How much do you like me?"

Buff immediately broke into a gentle perspiration. "I like you all right," he mumbled.

The lady laughed. "Is that the best you can do?"

"I don't know what you mean," lied Buff, heartily wishing himself elsewhere but lacking the nerve necessary to betake himself there.

"Don't you really know? Why do you suppose I brought you here? Why do you suppose I've lately been doing everything in my power to make you notice me?"

Buff goggled at her. "Wha-what?"

She impatiently nodded her head. "Do you mean to tell me you never noticed?"

"No, I never," he declared hastily. "Honest. If you ain't got anything for me to do, I——"

"Wait," the hand upon his knee was compelling. "Don't be so shy. My Lord, if all men were as jumpy as you are—you're not afraid of me, are you?"

"Nun-no."

"Then sit still, Buff. Look at me. No, don't turn your eyes away. Buff dear, you must know by this time how I feel toward you. You aren't so blind as all that. You can't be. Buff, I never thought I'd marry again. Never. But—but—oh, why don't you help me out?"

Buff had not the remotest intention of helping her out. He would have arisen, but one of her hands was bearing down

on his knee, the other grasped his sleeve. The arm of the sofa, slightly curved, held him in on the left side. He was practically penned.

"I—I——" he stuttered, and bogged down like a horse in a quicksand. But he felt like a steer in the squeezer.

The lady regarded him in silence a moment then continued in a more controlled tone. "This Pansy has a good trade, Buff, and I have other interests that bring me in an income. With you as my husband we'll go a long way. I need a man and you are that man. Oh, you needn't shake your head at me. I know what I'm doing. I—I love you, Buff." Before he could grasp her intention she flung both arms around his neck and kissed him.

No sooner did her mouth touch his than all nervousness left him. He became instantly cool and practical. With the utmost gentleness he reached back, took hold of her wrists, broke her grip and forced her hands down into her lap. She gazed at him wide-eyed, openmouthed.

"You mustn't do this," he told her. "You don't know what you're saying. We'll forget it, Lil."

He slid out of his seat with a jingle of spur rowels and reached for his hat. Lil was so silent that he glanced at her. She was sitting stiffly motionless, staring at him, her eyes blank, fixed, ophidian. A rattlesnake! He had killed at Mulcher's Gap had looked at him with just such eyes.

"When you don't want me?" said she in a dull, flat tone.

"I can't Lil. Honestly, I'd like to oblige you, but I can't."

She gave a short hysterical laugh and was across the room before he could bat an eye. One of his hands was on the door knob, but she jammed her foot against the door even as she flung both arms around his neck the second time.

"You don't mean it!" she whispered passionately. "Say you don't mean it, and I'll forgive you. Buff, Buff, I can make you happy, happier than any other woman can!"

But all this pleading left Buff as cold as perpetual snow. He felt that he was being made ridiculous. Manlike, he began to be angry.

"Stop it, Lil," he told her, twisting himself loose from her. He caught her by his neck and thrusting the lady from him. "I tell you you don't know what you're doing."

The lady stood away from him. Her hands were balled into fists. Her eyes were more reptilian than ever. "I—I'll leave you alone!" she declared in a choking voice. "But, I will! You'll regret this the longest day you live, and I'll see that you regret it if it's the last thing I do! Get out!"

Buff required no second invitation.

"Deliver me!" he said inwardly, as he went to find his horse. "Is Lil crazy or what is she?"

He tried to persuade himself that she must have been drunk but his own common sense told him that, allowing for the stress of her emotion, she had been as sober as the Asbertini justice in the land.

CHAPTER II.

IT MUST be borne in mind that these were the days before the West began to paint its houses; the days when there were no freight trains, no passenger trains, and more stage coaches than passenger cars; when a nickel was often mentioned but rarely seen, and the tall went with the hide in any game you chose to play; when a horse cost either five dollars or the expenditure of a little exertion on a moonlight night; when in the land there were three kinds of law—the kind men bought, the kind they carried in their guns, and the kind whose conception has been attributed to the late Mr Lynch.

But if those days were short on morals they were long on life. Folk were good, bad and indifferent, male and female after their kind, lived and loved, hated and fought as prodigally as ever they did in the days when chivalry was more than a name and the side-arm was the sword. It was the heyday of the individual. Anything could happen.

Buff Warren, riding to McPluke's old place, regarded the scheme of existence with the vision of one who looks thru a glass darkly. He was not sufficiently introspective to grasp the true significance of all that passed, but he was blessed or cursed with a flair for living of a fashion. Perhaps, in his heart, he felt, of course, for a single instant did he realize that he was a tiny chip in a current that was moving swiftly and persistiesly down to a shining sea. His eyes did not perceive the rocks that lay between, nor did his ears hear the roar of many waters—waters that would toss him high and drag him low, lash his soul, wrench his heart, twist his faith into a bitter mockery and turn his happiness into dusty ashes. Ashes that, until the feet of chance disturbed them, would afford no hint of the reward that lay beneath their drab surface. Not even could he have foreseen what the Three Sisters held in store for him; it is doubtful whether even would he have turned back. He was as courageous as a Bedlington terrier.

When he was within sight of the gray-brown log and shake shacks and stockade that had been McPlukes stables, Fred sat down, rolled a cigarette and in short ridge of ground slightly higher than the surface of the surrounding flat, he dragged the six-gun from its holster on his leg and twirled the cylinder, making sure that every chamber but one held a cartridge. Easing down the hammer on the empty chamber, he did a subsequent thing whose reason he could not come. He didn't believe that the nesters would show fight.

"They'd send riders fast enough. A poor-spirited lot, nesters.

He could not see the ranch-house itself. It lay behind the stables and corral, at the other end of the ridge, and below the crest where there was some protection from the winds that blew in winter.

The sun shone pleasantly, the sky was blue as a cowboy's girl's eyes; the cottonwoods and willows that outlined the banks of the Lazy River with their cool green covered and rustled in the breath of the baby breeze. The fair and summer weather combined with the natural beauty of the spot would have enraptured a poet. Buff was not a poet, yet he saw that this place was good.

"Dunno that I blame 'em," he muttered, his watchful eyes fixed on the corral and stables. "Just the place for a 'I'l ranch."

He walked his horse around the corral, circled the stables and sighted the gray-brown roof of the ranch-house lifting above the butt of the ridge. There was no smoke drifting from the chimney, but some one was chopping wood. He could plainly hear the clear smacks of the steel bit in the soft pine.

"Gil, is that you?"

The voice, and it was as deep and rich as an organ tone, came from behind Buff. He checked his horse and turned his head. He saw a man standing in the doorway of a stable, a man with white hair and a kindly, benevolent face. Here, obviously, was the owner of the ranch. Buff, noting that the ax ceased to chunk, turned his horse and rode toward the man in the doorway. The man lifted his hands rested on the door jamb, the other held a cane.

"Is that you, Gil?" asked the man again.

Buff wondered. The man was looking directly at him. "No," he answered, pulling up in front of the stable door, "I ain't Gil. You living here?"

The man smiled. His face was clean shaven, and Buff wondered at the extraordinary gentleness of his kindly expression. It made him feel somehow uncomfortable. It was as if he had been detected in an act of meanness.

"Yes," said the man in his deep, rich tones, "we are living here. What can I do for you, sir?"

Buff did not reply. He was lost in contemplation of the man's eyes. Not only were they, in this age so unusual as the man's voice, for, in sharp contrast with the hurly white eyebrows above them, they were remarkably black and lustrous, but they were apparently fixed on a point above Buff's hat. There was something so unnaturally still about the man's neck and the upward tilt of his chin. The man's hand dropped from the door jamb, he took a step forward, the cane touching the ground in front of him as he moved. "What can I do for you, sir?" he said, and his face turned, his eyes still fixed on a point above Buff's head.

Moved by a sudden impulse Buff leaned from the saddle and swept his hand in front of the others' face. The man made no sign that the shadow crossed his black eyes. Buff sat up very straight. He knew now what was the matter. The man was blind.

Never in all his life had he felt more like a fool than he did at that moment. He held a hale and hearty nester to fit. It was quite another to give similar orders to this blind man. He looked down at the man in silence. He was thinking. His thoughts raced, but notwithstanding that they almost tumbled over themselves, they clearly indicated the fence between whose sides he must choose. On one side was the custom of the country, the custom he knew and to which he subscribed as naturally as he breathed. On this side practically all of his friends were ranged in company with that daunting infinity, Public Opinion. His life, habits, mode of living, everything inclined to this side. On the other stood this blind man—alone. Of course the sound of the ax betokened the presence of a wife, children perhaps, but Buff did not think of them. He considered only the case of the man before him.

The smile had faded from the face of the blind man. His face sharpened with a sudden suspicion. "Who are you?" he asked. "Why don't you speak?"

He had not spoken sharply. He had not raised his voice. He stood there, his worn old face raised, waiting for the other to answer. It struck Buff that this was what the man would be doing to the end of his days—waiting on the pleasures of some one else. In that instant he made his decision.

"What is the matter?" asked the blind man, his anxiety creeping into his voice. "Why don't you speak? Who are you?" giving torgue at least. "My name's Warren. What might I call you, sir?"

The blind man's face cleared as if by magic. The smile returned to his countenance, he shifted his stick and held out his right hand. "Glad to know you, Mr. Warren. My name's Fair, Abijah Fair. Won't you strip and hobble and come down to the house? Dinner will be ready soon."

Buff hesitated. He was minded to refuse. Who he had made his choice and no longer felt like a yellow dog, that sensation had been replaced by one of utter repugnance toward the man who had made this choice necessary. But he knew that what he had started he must see thru. This meeting he had finally must be warned of what they might expect. For Caltrop would send another posse, several of them.

"I was wondering what was the matter with me," said Buff. "When you said dinner I knew I was hungry. Be right with you."

He hobbled his horse and slipped off saddle and bridle. While he was spreading his sweaty saddle blanket over his saddle, he saw a bare-headed woman coming from the direction of the ranch-house. She carried an ax over her shoulder. He thought she had been chopping wood. Then he had never seen. When she came close to the blind man she said, "What is it, dear? I heard you talking, and——" Her voice trailed off as she took his slim, impractical hand in her square, blunt-fingered one.

"This is Mr. Warren, Dora," said Fair. "My wife, Mr. Warren."

Buff straightened, jerked off his hat, came forward and took hands. Dora Fair gave him a firm grip and a slow smile. Her eyes were brown as a spaniel's, with the steadfast, questioning look in them that abides always in the eyes of those whose paths have been briary and rough.

"He's taking dinner with us, Dora," continued Fair.

"You'd better go down to the house." Mrs. Fair said hospitably, "It's cooler indoors."

Fair laid his wife's hand as they walked along slowly. Buff marked how cleverly she guided him around or over the inequalities of the ground. Once Mr. Fair turned his head stiffly in Buff's direction. "I can't walk very fast," said he. "I don't see as well as I might."

And the man stops blind!

Buff experienced a cold constriction of his throat. He coughed before he

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spoke. "Don't have to walk fast on my account. I never do myself."

A faint, irregular thumping noise drifted to Buff's ears. It sounded like some one beating a carpet. The sounds seemed to come from beyond the ranch-house.

When they reached the end of the ridge and the level ground beyond the ranch-house became visible, Buff stopped as tho shot. If he had been shot it is doubtful whether he could have been more unpleasantly surprised. For there, chocolate black against the green, lay a good six-acre rectangle of plowed ground. At one corner of the rectangle the plow, doubletree drunkenly askew, stood in a furrow. A plow! Buff had left the stony hill farm in Pennsylvania because of the monotony of plowing and harrowing. He had come West to the new country where there were no plows and where, please God, there never would be any plows. And here was a plow that had already turned under six acres. It was too much.

True, other nesters here and there had started their bits of truck patches before being definitely run out of the country, but none of them had used plows, and their patches had been comparatively insignificant. The ambitious enterprise before Buff's eyes was considerably more than Buff had bargained for. Not only was the blind man a nester; he was that unspeakable object, a granger.

He became suddenly conscious that the Fairs had halted and that Mrs. Fair was regarding him with some curiosity. "What's the matter?" she asked.

Buff took a long breath. "Nothing," he said, stepping out quickly. "I just happened to think of something, but it doesn't matter. You—you're going to have quite a garden."

"That's going to be more than a garden," said Mrs. Fair, as they walked on. "That's going to be an eight-acre field of corn. We want to get a crop in for winter feed. The garden's in front of the house. You can't see it but you can hear it."

"Hear it?"

"The twins are beating sod."

He nodded. That thumping noise. He had once beaten sod for a week when his father made an addition to their garden. Whack! whack! whack! whack! Shake and throw the grass aside. Repeat the operation world without end. Yes, indeed, he knew all about the infernal business.

"Step up here, Father," said Mrs. Fair at the kitchen door.

Buff followed them into the kitchen. A long-legged girl of 16 was standing over the four-hole stove. She was barefooted, snub-nosed, red-headed, and it is doubtful whether another freckle could have been crowded upon her cheerful countenance. She wore her red hair in two long pigtails that flapped about when she moved, which she was doing continually.

"Here's your chair, Father," said Mrs. Fair, gently guiding her husband to a hickory-built armchair standing between the windows.

"It's the turning that throws me out, Dora," Fair said apologetically. "Those two extra steps have me fooled still. But I'll get it in time."

"Of course you will," Mrs. Fair told him heartily. "You're doing fine. My! the way you get around by yourself." She slipped an arm around the waist of the girl at the stove, who had been viewing the stranger with the utmost interest. "This is my daughter Jemima, Mr. Warren."

Jemima held out a moist palm and shook hands gravely. "I'm glad to see you. It's nice to have company."

Buff mumbled something unintelligible and shuffled his helpless feet. He knew that his face was redder than beetroot. Mrs. Fair (she owned a pair of tactful thumbs) saw his distress and pointed to a chair beside the door.

"Sit down, do," she invited with her pleasant smile. "Smoke if you want to."

Buff was glad to do both. Mr. Fair joined him with a pipe.

"See anything of Gil yet, Mother?" asked Jemima, dipping a wooden spoon into a salt sack.

"Not yet."

"Gil's been gone a long time."

"It's a big country," struck in Mr. Fair. "I expect Juniper must have traveled some distance."

"I'd travel him!" Jemima cried vindictively, fiercely stirring the contents of the large saucepan. "That animal ain't—isn't worth powder to blow him up."

"Oh, yes he is, daughter," Mr. Fair contradicted judicially. "Oh, yes, he is. He'll pull his share of the load every time. You can't hitch him wrong, and he gets into his stride on a cold collar quicker than any—— Look out, Jem! Hominy's boiling over!"

"I declare, Father," exclaimed Jemima admiringly, as she moved the saucepan, "you can hear with your ears quicker than I can see with my eyes."

The blind face flushed with pleasure at the compliment. "I'm getting so I can hear pretty well. Better than I used to, a lot. But I kind of saw it a little too, I think."

"Of course you did, Father," corroborated Jemima, rushing across to her parent and giving him a brisk hug. "Your eyes are getting better every day. I know they are."

As she turned back to the stove Buff saw that her eyes were shining and that her young mouth was oddly set. Mrs. Fair bent over the woodbox. She seemed to be hunting for something in the bottom. Once she passed her hand quickly across her eyes.

Buff cleared his throat. And with that action, he swallowed, as it were, the plow.

BUFF cocked a surprised eyebrow. "Milk? Real milk?"

"Real milk." Jemima mimicked his tone to perfection. "And that's cream. For the coffee, you know. You pour it in and stir it round. It gives it a better flavor."

"Jemima!" exclaimed Mrs. Fair. "Mr. Warren is our guest."

Jemima winked at the guest. "We understand each other, don't we?"

The guest winked back. "You bet we do. Old friends, we are."

The twins stared at Buff with solemn, 12-year-old eyes. Their names were Bob and Bill, diminutives for Robert and Wilhelmina. Since both wore boy's style overalls, and their faces were practically similar it was impossible for the casual passerby to tell them apart. "We're going to raise beets, carrots, onions and cabbage in our garden," said one twin to Buff.

"And butter beans, string beans, and Evergreen corn," chanted the other twin to the same address.

"I wish I was going to help you," said Buff, and meant it, too.

"We've got a red cow and a red calf, ten heifers and a bull," said the first twin.

"Can you milk?" asked the second twin.

"Yes," replied Buff, recalling the innumerable times he had squatted on a milking stool and rammed his forehead into a cow's flank, "I can milk, all right."

Milking had been another reason for his leaving home. In his index of distasteful enterprises, milking ranked below plowing.

"You got to do lots of milking, I guess," remarked the first twin.

"I never do any at all," said Buff.

Both twins wrinkled their foreheads (they were pleasant-faced youngsters with brown eyes and hair). "Ain't you a cowboy?" the asked together.

Buff nodded. "Something like that."

"But don't you milk your cows none—any, I mean?" demanded the first twin.

"You see, they ain't milkin' cows," explained Buff. "They're eatin' cows."

"What's the difference between a milkin' cow and a eatin' cow?" they wished instantly to know.

"There, there, children, that'll do," interrupted Mrs. Fair. "Give Mr. Warren a chance to eat his meal in peace. Another cup of coffee, Mr. Warren?"

It was excellent coffee. Buff had another cup. When the dried-apple pie was put on the table, he had a third cup to wash down his piece with. It was after the meal when he had taken his chair back to the side wall opposite the doorway for a smoke that the twins attacked him again. The difference between a milking cow and an eating cow had to be explained. No two ways about that. So, while they stood one on each side of him, he cleared up the mist that befogged their youthful minds.

". . . and that's how it is," he concluded, and looked up—looked up and into the face of the pretty girl with honey-colored hair and amber eyes, the girl that had made him think of home and the blue Pennsylvania hills and cowbells and mountain laurel and honeychucks.

But she did not make him think of those things now. For, as she stood squarely in the doorway, it might almost be said that she glared at him. Certainly there was no hint of sweetness in those amber eyes. Rather there was plenty of fire. Her curved brows (it suddenly struck him that they were many shades darker than her hair and that the effect was not unpleasing) were drawn together in an unmistakable scowl.

Mr. and Mrs. Fair had gone into another room. But Jemima and the twins were still in the kitchen. The twins stared wonderingly at the girl in the doorway. Not so Jemima. She promptly stepped forward to do the honors.

"Gil," said she, indicating Buff with the plate she was wiping, "this is Mr. Warren. Mr. Warren, my sister."

Gil did not move. Her eyes lost none of their hostility. Buff had risen to his feet. He smiled. The girl did not smile. A long thirty seconds the girl stared, stared him up and down as if he were a strange creature of unpleasant habits and ancestry. Then she tossed her head and moved aside, leaving the doorway open. "Get out," said she.

"Gil!" cried Jemima, springing in front of her. "What's the matter with you? Have you gone crazy?"

"No, I haven't gone crazy. But I guess

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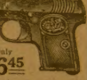
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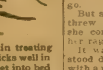

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...you must have, to let that man in here. Get out of my way, front of you." But young lady of action put forth hand and plucked a rifle from behind the door. "Now," she pursued to Buff's address, cocking the hammer, "you going to leave?"

"Don't be a fool!" exclaimed Buff sharply. "Haven't you any better sense than to monkey with a gun with kids in the room? Put that gun down and I'll go."

But she did not put the gun down. She threw it up to her shoulder. "Go on," she commanded, her voice hoarse with fear rage. "I'll—"

It was then that the twins, who had stood dumb and motionless, came to life with a rush. They front of the kitchen, yelling; they their mother at the top of their lungs. Jemima did not run from the room. She, too, front of Buff. Her face was pale under the freckles and her voice shook as she cried, "You're not going to shoot him! You're not! Mother, Mother, come quick!"

Buff thrust his hands under Jemima's armpits and gently lifted her to one side. "Ne call to get all fussed up," said he. "I was goin' anyway."

"Put down that gun, Gil!" ordered Mrs Fair.

"I won't!" snapped Gil, keeping the barrel trained on Buff during his progress to the door. "If that man doesn't get out quick, I'll shoot him!"

"Not with that gun," Fair said dryly. "I unloaded it this morning. Put it back where it belongs. Please, Mr. Wa— Mr. Buff, I want to get at the bottom of this."

Buff paused on the threshold, his grounded the rifle with a thud and slammed it behind the door.

"That's better," commented Mrs. Fair. "What made you act that way, Gil?"

"Mother!" exclaimed Gil, almost weeping with rage, pointing a trembling finger at Buff. "Hasn't that man said anything?"

"Said anything," repeated Mrs. Fair. "He stayed to dinner and talked with us, if that's what you mean."

"You actual—talked to him?"

"I don't know why I shouldn't," said her mother sharply. "It seems to me, Gil, you've lost the use of your senses. What you need is a good big drink of sassafras tea."

No, I don't either, and I don't care if you have given in. I haven't, and I won't! I won't! I don't want to stay here, if I can help for it! They shan't run me off! I tell you that!"

"You needn't stamp your foot at me, young lady," Mrs. Fair told her calmly. "I'm glad to hear that you won't give in, even if I don't. I don't know yet what you are talking about."

"Didn't that man tell you to get out?" Mrs Fair shook her head. "He's been very—"

"If he hasn't told you yet, he will. He will. That's what he came for. You know that nice girl that stopped by here yesterday—Rainbow Fernald? I met her this morning and she told me about that man. She described him exactly, and she said he'd been sent by the owner of the $8 to tell us to leave, and if we wouldn't quit they'd drive us out. Oh, Mother, Mother, it's always move on, move on, move on, and I thought we'd come home at last!"

The mother moved swiftly to her daughter's side. "There there, dearie," she said quietly, slipping an arm around her daughter's waist. "Don't cry. You had me good and scared for a minute. I tell you, Gil, I'm too old for such goings on. Don't you do it again."

Gone was the wild rage of the girl. She was just a weeping now, glad of her mother's nearness. She dabbed a shirt sleeve across her eyes. "All the same, you ask him what I said."

"I intend to." There was a grim note in Mrs. Fair's voice. "Is there anything in what my daughter says, Mr. Buff?"

Buff Warren stood and fumbled with his hat. He was in the throes of exactly the same emotion suffered by a man about to pay a visit to the dentist. He wished that the earth would open and receive him into its midst, or that he would instantaneously drop dead. He was red to the ears. His skin prickled as once, escaped his face till his spur rowels rattled like castanets.

"Well?" said Mrs. Fair.

Buff raised his head. Jemima had taken post at her mother's side. Her brown eyes held a hurt look, the look that comes in a friendly dog's eyes when it is shoved away or kicked. The twins were looking at him, too. Hostility was in their stare.

"It's true," said he bluntly. "I was sent here to tell you people to drag it."

Jemima drew a quick breath. "Why didn't you tell us then?"

"I changed my mind."

"Changed your mind?" Jemima again. He nodded uncomfortably. "You see, when I rode in here and saw what kind of folks you were, and—and all like that, I understand, I—I—It struck me all of a heap there wasn't any reason why you didn't have as much right here as the next fellah. It'd have nothing to do with running you off."

"There, now, I knew it!" Jemima exclaimed in ecstatic accents.

"It's a trick!" rebutted Gil with equal promptness.

"You think so?" Buff grinned. The situation was his and he knew it. "I'll call that bluff. I take it you found the mule you were looking for. You did? Good enough. Where is he? And the other one—he with him? Fine. Jemima, do you show where the team harness is."

Jemima's eyes were dancing. So were her feet. "I'll show you! C'mon."

Buff pulled on his hat and turned to follow. On the doorstep he paused long enough to pose his head round the door jamb and say:

"If you folks will come outdoors in about ten minutes, I'll give you a first-class imitation of a young man and two mules plowing up that going-to-be cornfield."

"Come, all you jolly plowboys, come listen to my tales,
And join with me in chorus, I'll sing the plowboy's praise.
My song is of the plowboy's fame, and unto you I'll relate the same,
He whistles, sings, and drives his team, the plowing to boot."

THUS the Rainbow, in a soft and rich contralto. She flung a booted leg round the saddlehorn and leaned forward to watch Buff shake his plow out on the furrowed grass at the end of the furrow.

"You did that well," she said critically. "I expect you must have been a hilltop Reuben at one time. I'm surprised at you. I am indeed. And you with such an innocent face!"

Buff leaned on a plow handle and looked the lady over. "I don't know you," he said finally. "I've never saw you before."

"There are thirty-six verses to that song," threatened the Rainbow.

"In that case, I'm pleased to make your acquaintance," Buff surrendered coolly. "Pleased to—"

"Good plowing weather," observed the Rainbow.

"Don't rub it in, Rainbow. You know I always was your friend. You be a good girl now, and ride away on you pinto pony, and next time I see you I'll give you one extra big round, juicy bell pep."

"You'll give me one great, big, round, juicy bell pep!" Rainbow's what you'll give me, you old-fool Rainbow. You'll pay your bets, young fellah, and don't you forget it!"

Buff delicately cupped a hand at his ear. "What's that? Bet? Oh, yes. Bet! Pretty name, Bet. I knew a girl named that once back East somewheres. Used to call her Betty. She had laughing hair and curly eyes and the most taking ways you ever saw. She was all right to me, tho. Never missed anything but my watch. Outside of that—"

The Rainbow began to stamp mossy and knotted her pretty eyes. "Bah! I want my bridle, I want my hand-carved split-ear with the silver bit and rein chains and silver spots and the silver conchas and seven-foot reins and—"

"What on earth is the matter?" broke in the voice of Gilian Fair, who had come up unnoticed. She stood and stared at the trainer in astonishment.

The Rainbow turned a laughing face toward her, and Buff cut in with, "It's just her bridle, Miss Fair. She's been funnin' with folks. Don't you mind her. I expect she wasn't licked regular when she was young."

The Rainbow grinned. She knew that he intended to pay the bet, had intended to pay it from the beginning, and she knew that he knew. So she dropped an eyelid at him and said to Miss Fair, with the most innocent air in the world:

"We had a bet on. I won and now he's

(Continued on Page 15.)

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ALL THIEVES' TRAIL

BY FREDERICK DAVIS

THE lone cabin on Knob Point was gilded by the falling sun as Doane sat at the split-log table, his shoulders hunched, and ate supper. His movements were impatiently quick, his eyes shifted about restlessly; he emptied his tin coffee cup and put it in the center of his bare tin plate before either his partners Hunter, or the stranger, sitting opposite him, finished. With a wearied, detached air, colored by aversion, he looked all around him. A dislike for the shaky cabin, for Hunter, even for their jointly owned placer mine, had been growing in him for weeks. This eternal mining, mining, mining, was slavery—he hated it. All day long, every day, without rest, from sunup to sundown, he washed gravel off the ribs of Twisty Creek, which curled around the Point, and altho he loved the gold he found, he loathed the labor of finding it. So he had slowly, secretly, built a scheme by which he could leave this noxious scene permanently—and profitably. He planned to steal the precious metal which Hunter and he had panned and cached—half of it his partner's.

Across the crude table Doane eyed Hunter with suppressed rancor. On Doane's right cheek was an irregular blotch of black-blue, where Hunter's fist had struck during a fight, which had risen over Hunter's accusation that Doane was shirking his share of the work. This combat had come as the climax of a series of quarrels, all about the same subject—each accusing the other of slacking, each hotly denying the charge. The partnership had become one of continual strife and word-whipping. Doane wanted to dissolve it, but knew of no way to do so without sacrificing his share of the gold still lying in the banks of Twisty Creek. And so he held on, his vindictiveness toward Hunter increasing daily until it had reached an unbearable strain.

Hunter finished drinking his coffee and sat back. The stranger, who had happened by their cabin while Doane and Hunter were baking biscuits, rubbed his palms contentedly over his bald head and blinked.

"Ah'm shore grateful for them eatin's," he said. "'Twas mighty friendly o' you to put me up for 'em. Well, guess Ah'll be gettin' on my way over yonder."

"Prospectin'?" Hunter inquired. His eyes were heavily lidded, making him appear to be always sleepy; also, his heavy cheeks sagged, like those of a woolly hound. "Or just drifting?"

"Just moseyin' around a mite," the stranger answered vaguely. He rose, took up his pack, slipped his gray felt hat over his bald head and waved his hand thru the door. "Night."

Doane, thru the door, watched the stranger heel down the hill and blend into the purple haze of the trees lying thickly in the eastern distance. Then he turned to his sleepy-eyed partner.

"Let's see the pull."

Hunter took a leather sack from his belt, and slid the contents out—a number of shining nuggets. Doane did the same with the contents of a belt he took from his hip pocket. They mixed the nuggets on the table and carefully counted them. Doane avariciously eyed them, reflecting greedily that soon all of this gold—all of it, not half—would be his. Eighteen of the same pebbles made up the day's pull—nine for each of them. Hunter counted them into a sack again.

"Placer's about ready to peter out, ain't it?" Doane asked, hoping that it would.

"Plenty in it yet," Hunter answered slowly. "Good for a heap." He faced Doane with a conspicuous pause. "If you hanker for your half of it, you better quit kickin' and workin'."

"I work all I need to," Doane growled angrily. "I don't hanker to be growled at all the time by a mangey old critter like you!"

"Dry up, you loafer. If you don't want to tarry around, vamose!"

"Shut up yourself, you varmint! I'm not aimin' to leave all the gold in the placer to you, thankee!"

"You don't deserve any. I'm doin' all the work."

"We're equals on this—I'm gettin' half by rights!" Doane sneered scathingly. Hunter rose disgustedly. He thought: "I don't deserve half, hey? By night I'll have all of it. I deserve every little grain of it!" With difficulty he concealed the strong sense of gratification that rose in him at the thought.

THE partners went together, not speaking, out of the cabin and shambled down the hill and toward the creek. They passed the excavation and trough of the placer, and stopped beside a wide area of black-brown ground, intermingled with gray—quicksand. Around this patch clumps of sheltering trees grew.

Hunter quickly shinned up the trunk of the largest and crawled out on a limb which overspread the mire below. He pulled strength on a wire which hung invisibly from the limb. The wire brought with it out of the mud a dripping tin bucket, opening this, Hunter placed the day's nuggets in one of four tiny sacks inside. Then he replaced the cover, lowered the container by the wire to the mud. It sank quickly out of sight, and stopped suspended in the quicksand when the supporting wire became taut. The invisibility of the wire in the shade of the surrounding trees, the insupportable liquidity of the ground surrounding the sunken bucket, provided full protection for the cache. This ingenious device was so strong that for two months Hunter had added, carefully, his knowledge of its secret to no one, every one except each other. As night fell neither conversed. By the orange light of a lantern Hunter chopped plug tobacco with his knife, and smoked; Doane polished his revolver. Doane was restless and fidgety. Later they lighted the lantern and slipped into their bunks to sleep.

A long time Doane waited, lying stark awake, listening. Across the cabin Hunter made no sound. Doane raised himself on his elbow and stared blindly thru the blackness. Satisfied that Hunter was sleeping, he rose. Silently he pulled his boots on, tiptoed to the door and out. He took a number of biscuits from a tin box in the corner, and wrapped them with a flour sack and a small frying pan in his blanket. He carried these outside also. Then he took from his bunk four leather sacks such as they kept nuggets in. Going outside, he took up his pail and stood listening, and knew from voices and snores inside that Hunter was sleeping soundly. Doane toed down the hill a short distance, then sat on the ground and laced his boots. Carrying his pack again he walked swiftly past their placer.

On the edge of the quicksand he stooped and filled the four leather sacks with damp sand and gravel. The night was fairly bright, moonlight glistening in the quieter pools. He looked down into the still mire. Doane no small knowledge of quicksand. Doane lowered the fat sacks into his pockets, and climbed the big tree. Carefully he pulled on the wire and raised the bucket out of the mire below; he lifted the four heavy sacks out, working by the sense of touch since the shade of the trees made seeing almost impossible. He exchanged the sacks he had filled with pebbles for those in the bucket. Then he lowered the closed vessel into the swamp again and came down the tree. He stuffed the exchanged bags into his pockets and stood listening, looking around.

Words came into Doane's head—words he had heard years before. Gunster, the silver-haired, wily old sheriff of Andrew County, long since dead, had observed to him:

"All outlaws' minds are alike, I reckon. They all behave like each other out yere in the West. I allays remember that, and that's the reason I allays get my man. Gunster's reputation as an unfailing man catcher was World-wide. "I just figger out where I would go if I was sneakin' off with a man's dust, and I find that trail, and I find the robber every time. Out here 'tain't like in a big city, where a thief can hide everywhere. In the West, some other goes where the others go. That's right, I reckon. All thieves' trails are alike."

Doane felt determined to defeat this philosophy. He confided to what he could Hunter, upon awakening in the morning, must not find him. His trail would be no other man's, but that of the blackest region in the wall of trees to the east and hastened toward it. The path of a deer would lead him on; it would take him by morning, he knew, to the plateau above. Of course, Hunter would suppose that Doane had gone to Foletta, the nearest town—he would go there, while in reality Doane would be miles away! Doane was determined that, while Sheriff Gunster's philosophy might be correct in every other case, in his it would be wrong.

Doane trailed on. The heaviness of the fat sacks in his pocket was enjoyable—the burden of that gold he owned. How Hunter would curse at the discovery he discovered his loss in the morning. Doane chuckled—laughed aloud with malicious enjoyment at the picture of Hunter futilely raving. He followed the path of the rivulet until the silver of dawn developed in the eastern sky and came filtering down thru the foliage. Around him the night sounds of insects changed to a quicker tempo. The woods awakened and rustled with the first stirred wind of the day. The roll of blankets which Doane carried on his shoulder became weighty; the sacks in his pockets pulled relentlessly toward the ground, making progress hard. Doane was tired. The woods around him thinned. He came into the open of a bowlderous territory, dark and wide, rough-floored by irregular rock forma-

BITS OF LIFE
MARRY ME KID!
ALCOHOLIC BREATH
PUZZLE - GIVE TWO GOOD REASONS WHY HE WANTS TO MARRY HER - ALSO TWO GOOD REASONS WHY SHE SHOULD REFUSE HIM?
HEY YOUNG FELLER YA' GOT A FLAT TIRE THERE!
OH, NO I HAVEN'T
(FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW—"FLAT-TIRE" IS A NICK NAME FOR A GIRL WHO WON'T "PET.")
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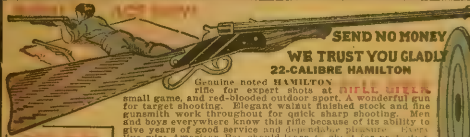
SEMI-AMERICAN GOV'MT OFFICIAL
US CAN'T HOLD A MAN'S WORDS IN HA PERSHAN WAY
"HAVE YOU EVER SEEN BEE'S KNEES?"
NO REALLY OLD DEAR, I'VE NEVA CARED FOR THE STUDY OF INSECTS
"BEE'S KNEES!"
OOOOH HOW WUNERFUL
HOW GRAND!
LONDON!
LOOK OUT!
CRACK!
CRACK!
SPLASH!



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tions, projections, peaks, around which he picked his way. Hungry and weary and eager for a sight of the gold, he halted. He dropped his roll of blankets to the ground, heaved the sacks out of his pockets, stretched out on the smooth side of a cool bowlder, and rested. He dozed; and after a while rose. He loosed the leather strings which fastened the mouths of the bags. Suddenly he paused. His head, moving warily and slowly, he heard the beat of heavy heels coming near.

HE STOOD up, listening. Because of the repeated echoing of the rhythmic sound from the flat sides of the gray bowlders around him, he could not discern the direction from which it was coming. Moving warily and silently, he toed around the rock. Tho the sound of the footfalls continued, he saw no one. He circled. Then, abruptly, he stepped out before another man. He gasped his astonishment. In an instant the rifle dropped out and pointed out and levelled—and each stared into the other's eyes, scarcely believing his senses.

"Hunter!" Doane gasped.

"Doane!" Hunter exclaimed.

For an instant Doane feared that Hunter had succeedingly trailed him after perhaps awakening during the night and discovering his absence—but Hunter was not a gold seeker, and determined but utterly astounded, confused. Like statues the men glared at each other, neither understanding the presence of the other. Over Hunter's shoulder was a roll of blankets like Doane's—in his pockets were bulges like his gold; and like those Doane had carried. With his revolver firmly held, Hunter glanced at the leather sacks which Doane still carried in his left hand.

"What're you doin' here?" he demanded. "How'd you get here? I thought I left you back in the cabin, sleepin'!"

"So you tried to sneak away with the gold while I was sleepin', hey?" Doane demanded angrily. "What's them bags you got in your pockets?"

"What's that you got in your fist?" Hunter countered.

Doane looked and gripped his gun more tightly. "You thought you could steal out while I was asleep, did you! Well, I beat you to it, see? After all, that's what! All you got in them sacks is gravel!" He laughed triumphantly.

Hunter swore. "You d—d thief! Im goin' to kill you!"

"Go easy! We both got the same idee tonight. You thought you was doubletrossin' me, but you wasn't. You make a move with that gun, or your hand, and you'll be a dead animile before you can wink!"

Hunter's face flushed with rage. His six-shooter exploded with a roar. A powerful shock twisted Doane's body; and at the same time his friend felt a turn. Conscious of no pain, but dazed and bewildered, he waited tensely for the powerful shock of a bullet. Hunter came visible, stooping with a stinging hand pressed between his knees, his face contorted with agony and guilt. He rapidly inspected himself: he was not hurt, but Hunter's bullet had cut cleanly thru the leather sack which he had gripping in his left hand. And from the rent in the leather a fine stream of sand was pouring.

"Holy coyotes!" he whooped when he saw it.

He tore the mouth of the sack open, and dumped the contents out. It was not gold, as he had supposed—not a grain of it. Sand, fine and yellow, it dropped in his surprise. And what of the other sacks? Quickly he whirled around the rock and picked up the other three. All were plump and heavy. Doane ripped their ends open, and emptied them, growling. Each of them was also full of sand! Doane's stiffened fingers let the sacks drop; he stared into the air with utter dumfoundment. He could not guess what had happened. He tottered around the rock toward Hunter.

Hunter was nursing his hand and swearing. "You dummed old mule, you about shot my mitt off!"

"I didn't know you'd not even bleedin'. Open them sacks you got. Open 'em, I say!"

Hunter glumly took the sacks from his pockets and drew their mouths. They were full to the brim with sand—the sand which he had shoveled and had filled them, at the patch of quickland.

"Where's that gold?" Doane demanded.

"I dunno!"

"You stole it!"

"How could I steal it when you stole it first?" Hunter countered. His eyes narrowed dangerously. "You stole it yourself! You sneaked. 'You goin' to kill you, you lizard!"

"What for, you old cayuse? All I got was what you was after, too. I'm sure tried to steal my gold to boot. You're just as crazy as I am!"

Hunter peered into the loco!"

"Somebody else must 'a' hooked them nugg-ets."

"Who?" Hunter demanded.

"How do you reckon I know?"

"It wasn't me!"

"It wasn't me, either."

Doane devoted some thought to the matter. "I got to the bucket afore you, I reckon. Look, you're not the gold out of the bucket, but there wasn't gold in it then—I just thought there was. Somebody took it out after I left there."

"Who did?" Hunter asked bluntly again.

"Aw, quit askin' me questions!"

THEIR mutual antagonism for the time forgotten, they sat down together on a rock and stared at the ground thoughtfully. The sun climbed higher. After a while Doane spoke with perplexity.

"That gold just turned into sand, magic like, that's all. Nobody in this wide world knows about that bucket in the swamp except you and me."

Doane nodded wearily. "Well, anyway, old Sheriff Gunster was right."

"How so?"

"He used to say that all thieves' trails are alike. We both used to steal each other's gold last night, and we both picked out the same trail to get away. Gunster used to say that when that's the case one outlaw would go the same way another outlaw would go, out here in the wilderness. And he always bumped into his man and put him in the caboose. He used to say a thief'll look around, Gunster used to say, and think, 'Now this way is a good trail, and that is a better trail, and t' other is the best of all, and I'll take that.' And other way, of course. Then Gunster used to stand in the same place and look around and think, 'Now this is a good trail one, and that trail is a better one, and t' other trail is best of all,' and he'd take t' other one—and he always bumped into a coyote."

Hunter nodded. "And we both picked out the best trail last night, and that's why we both picked out the same one. I reckon old Gunster knowed what he was talkin' about."

"Well, maybe so. If somebody stole our nuggets, then, and took the same trail we did, he ought to be easy enough to see him any minute. But I don't see him nowheres."

"I'm hungry," Hunter drawled. "I'm hungry as a starved coyote. Let's mess some grub together."

They gathered dry bits of wood from the banks of a small stream which trickled its way across the rocks, and built a fire and cooked their food. They fried ham and sanwiched it between their biscuits, taking water from the rivulet as a beverage. With their hunger placated, they still worried about the absence of their gold. Finally they kicked out the fire and cleaned out their utensils with forlorn slowness.

"I don't know who could 'a' took it," Doane said at last, "unless you did. And I don't know how to get it back. It's just gone—all gone—and nothing can be did about it." He sighed.

Hunter agreed morosely. "I reckon if we want some gold," he opined, "we better go back and pan it. That's the only way——"

He stopped, sniffing the air.

"I smell coffee cookin'," he said. "And we didn't cook coffee."

Doane breathed in the air likewise. "I smell it! Somebody else is around here with a fire, making grub!"

They stood up, looking at each other meaningly. "Maybe the hombre what stole our nuggets!" Hunter said suddenly.

"But nobody knowed where we hid it." Doane protested

"Makes no difference! Somebody might 'a' found out. Look around that rock there!"

You go that way," Doane suggested. "And I'll snoop around on this side."

Hunter disappeared behind the formation, stepping cautiously. [illegible] carefully circled in the [illegible] direction. The smell of coffee became stronger. He could find no smoke, no indication of a fire. He was puzzled anew. He walked in a complete circle around the huge pile of bowlders without seeing a sign of a camper, with the smell of coffee persisting. He paused and scratched his head in bewilderment. Where was that coffee boiling? Doane began to wonder if he were loco, or if a ghost was having breakfast near. He did not know what to do. He called for Hunter.

"Hi!"

No answer came.

"Hi, Hunter!" he yelled again.

Again no answer. Doane swore softly.

(Continued on Page 22.)

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The Twisted Foot.

(Continued From Page 11.)

trying to get out of paying it. Aren't men the shortest sports?"

"What were you betting about?" dodged Miss Fair

"A quirt goes with that bridle," thrust in Buff before the Rainbow could make reply

The Rainbow affected to ignore him completely. "We made a bet that —"

"And a pair of spurs!" Buff cried in desperation

The Rainbow affected to hesitate "Silver inlaid?"

Buff gulped, then, as the lady opened her mouth, made instant capitulation "Silver-inlaid, hand-carved leathers and glass rosettes."

"Good enough."

"But what was the bet?" demanded the mystified Miss Fair.

"The bet?" repeated the Rainbow, and openly gave Buff a reassuring nod "Oh, he bet his horse could beat mine, and I beat him. Not much of a bet."

"I'd call it a pretty fair bet," said Miss Fair. "All that silver-in-laid truck."

"I've got to be going," said Buff, "if I'm going to get an acre under by sundown."

The Rainbow watched him go, straddling away on his high-heeled boots, watched him swing the plow upright, watched him start a fresh furrow and said to Miss Fair, a dancing devil in her black eyes:

"You've hired a hand there."

Miss Fair shook her honey-colored head. "We haven't hired him. We can't afford a man I wish we could."

"Then how ——"

Miss Fair explained hurriedly. The Rainbow listened in silence. When the other girl had said her say, the Rainbow nodded absently. "He's a good-hearted boy," she observed. "But there's only one of him. They'll send somebody else, several somebody elses. You know I warned you what would happen," she added, as her listener's face clouded.

"I know you did. But—but somehow I keep hoping. We've got a right here." With a flash of amber-colored eyes "But they don't think so. And they——" She did not complete the sentence.

"They've got the power," Miss Fair assented wearily. "I suppose they own the sheriff."

"Body, soul and roll."

"No help there."

"Not a bit. But there's Dolan.

"Who's he?"

"County Judge—and an odd number. Nobody can say he owns him, and he jumps whichever way he likes. Always has. Always will. A cold proposition, too. So far he's always been on the side of the cattlemen, because the nesters we've had around here were a rustlin' bunch of jiggers and he wasn't wasting any sympathy on them. But you people are different."

"Thank you," Miss Fair remarked dryly.

"I'm not throwing bouquets," said the Rainbow. "I'm stating facts. Dolan might help—if he knew the facts."

"I'm not going whining to any judge, and that's flat. If we can't get justice without telling all our private affairs, then we don't want justice. We'll rub along the best we can without it."

"I—uh—I didn't mean you," said the Rainbow awkwardly, if anything that naturally graceful girl said or did could be awkward. "I didn't mean you. I know the judge. Now listen, honey, don't get mad. I want to help all I can."

Gillian Fair laid her hand on the Rainbow's knee and smiled up into her face "I've only known you four days, but I feel as if I'd known you all my life We're friends, and we're going to keep on being friends. But don't you say anything to the judge about us—about —about how we're fixed and all. We're not looking for sympathy. Promise, Rainbow?"

The Rainbow boarded her last card "I was over at the 88 today. I didn't want to tell you. Mame's my friend, and it seemed like spying, sort of. But I don't care. It isn't fair. Not a bit. When I was passing the office door on my way home I heard Caltrop. He was swearing about what he'd do. I only told you the half of it when I said more of the boys would be sent here to run you off. Caltrop is aiming to burn all the buildings, run off your stock and burn your [illegible]s and wagons. He's fixing to set you plumb afoot. A shining example to the nesters is what he says"

Miss Fair's face blanched. Then her chin stiffened. "I wonder if they think we'll take all that sitting down"

"What can you do?"

"I can shoot—a little. So can Mother."

The Rainbow shook her head. "That would be the worst thing you could do. Make 'em mad for nothing. You wouldn't gain anything, not a thing. I—uh—I talked to Mame She said she'd speak to her husband, but —"

"I wish you hadn't said a word to her," interrupted Gillian. "We're not beggars and we certainly don't want sympathy from anybody whose husband wants to run us off."

"Now listen, dear," said the Rainbow, trying hard to hold down her none-too-equable temper "Better let me drop a word in the judge's ear, anyway."

"Promise me you won't say a word to him or any one else." Miss Fair insisted

"Oh, all right." Thus the Rainbow pettishly. "But if I'd known you were going to act this way, I'd never have told you a single word. I think you're making a big mistake, Gil. You'll need all the help you can get."

"Help you have to whine for isn't worth much. If it comes to the worst, and they jump us, I'll go to the judge and ask for the protection and redress we're legally entitled to. But I certainly am not going to him now, and I shan't go at all if I can help it."

The Rainbow gathered up her reins. "Gil, you're too damned proud for [illegible] human use, and if I stay here any longer you and I'll fight. So long"

And then the fun begins, only most of the time it doesn't look like fun. In fact, it looks like sudden death and a few other mildly exciting adventures. Be sure you get your copy next week.

The Weeper Sex.

Continued From Page 6.)

clubs, don't sell the sort of comforts men marry for—the companionship of the woman they love. Now I'm not going to say any more. If you want to sue for divorce I shall not contest it. I suppose you have grounds. But I want you to go on home and think this thing over—and if you ever want me you know where to find me."

"I'll never want you."

"Very well." He stepped to the door and was gone. And again Edith indulged in a good cry.

AUNT JANE eyed the golden-haired woman for something like thirty seconds in silence, then allowed her eyes to turn to the window. Outside a cold rain was falling, an automobile skidded crazily on the wet pavement. Then

"Quite different weather to that we had up at Mountain Peak the last time I saw you. And——"

She smiled slightly. "As I was saying, Edith learned her lesson—learned it well. That is more apparent to me every time I run over to visit her. For the first time in years she is really happy—radiantly so. She and Gerald attend all the dances. There are times when she reminds me of a flapper. Looks ten years younger—girlish, in fact. And Gerald is like a boy. You never saw such a lover. They are real sweethearts—now Edith is no fool. I would never have tried my plan, Mrs. Mortimer, if I hadn't known that she possessed real good sense—once she should be awakened and put it to use. It took only two days after she returned to the city for her to see where she had been foolish—and go after Gerald. Oh! yes, she went to his club for him—didn't take chances on 'phoning him to come to her. She had seen the light, realized that she had made a dull, uninteresting drudge of herself doing things for her family that they would have preferred doing for themselves—or, in many cases, having left undone. She at last realizes that a real man wants a companion for a wife, not a servant. And she's being that companion. And never has headaches—or any other sort of ache. And now——"

She smiled again. "Here is the remainder of the price for your work, the [illegible] that [illegible] paid [illegible] when I knew your services would be no longer needed. And [illegible]"

Methodically, Louise Mortimer counted the bills handed her. Then: "Thank you And I hope your opinion of me won't be too harsh. I'm not quite as bad as you may think. And I must live."

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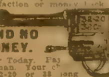

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Mary Jane	Girl of My Dreams	I'll Not Forget You, Dear	You Are My Queen
Red Fern	Maybe I'll Come Back	Every Girl I Get	Don't You Forget to [illegible]
Mother	One Little Girl	Watching and Waiting	Down In Melody Lane
Betsy Moss	I'm Pining for You	Sometime, Sweetheart Mine	Beautiful Love
Lovin' Bug	Dear Little Genevieve	I'm Longing For the Old Days	The Old Fashioned Game of Love
Little Maid	Just a Picture of You	Come Where the Violets Bloom	If I Had a Thousand Hearts
Sweetheart	Ridin' Off to Dreamland	There's No Girl Like Old Girl	I Often Wonder If You Miss Me
Creole Belle	My Auto Girl	If I Only Had a Sweetheart	You are the Same Sweet Girl
Sally Mine	Roses at Twilight	Silver Threads Among the Gold	Roses Will My Secret Keep
Jennie Jones	Two Eyes of Brown	Deep In My Heart, Beloved	When the Lilacs Bloom Again
'Deed I Do	You Are My Queen	Won't You Let Me Be Your Honey	Some Day Perhaps You'll Know
Honey	Goodbye Annie Laurie	Little Star Won't You Twinkle	Sing Me a Love Sweet Song [illegible]
Priscilla	Come Down Miss Malinda	I'm Pining Away for You	The Whole World Reminds Me of You
[illegible]	Beautiful Love	And Then Say Adieu	If All the Little Angels
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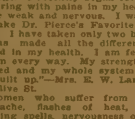

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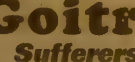

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about my opinion. I investigated you thoroly before employing you to handle this case. I didn't want any comeback suits. And I'm satisfied with what I learned. Since you're living by your wits—pardon me if I'm frank—I see nothing wrong with your earning a little money by bringing happiness to others."

Mrs. Mortimer rose. "And of course Mrs. Armstrong will never know the trick that was played on her. I can trust me to keep my mouth closed. Anyway, I'm leaving the city tonight—for good."

Aunt Jane laughed shortly. "No she will never know. And—"

Her old eyes twinkled. "I suppose, Mrs. Mortimer, I might as well let you in on a little secret. Your vanity may not be tickled, but at least you'll know that what you did has hurt nobody—and I believe you'd like to know that."

"I would. Of course I cared nothing for Gerald Armstrong. I realized that fully the day, at your suggestion, I staged that little love scene in the woods. I just happened to think what if it were real—and went cold all over."

Aunt Jane nodded. "Yes. I realize he isn't foolish as one might think. You see, Mrs. Mortimer, I—"

For no particular reason, Aunt Jane lowered her voice. "Gerald loves his wife . . . I don't think I ever knew a man who was quite so fond of a woman as he is of Edith. But he was miserable . . . Me, my heart broken, he married, not a faithful, conscientious servant now insisted on wrecking her health—and happiness. I made a brave effort to be what she thought a wife and mother should be. And he wanted that sweetheart of mine to take a great risk. The experiment—" the old lady smiled happily—"was Gerald's own idea. He planned the whole thing—and got me to employ you to work it out."

THE END.

* * *

They Who Touch Fire

(Continued From Page 8.)

"Are you sure?"

Keith she studied him.

"Very well, then," he shrugged. "How much, Constance?"

She colored slightly, then tapped her knee with a slender dimpled hand. For the first time her voice went cold and hard.

"It's worth exactly five thousand."

He raised a warning, protesting hand. "Absurd!" he answered, the color mounting again in his cheeks. "Preposterous!"

She rose instantly, and half-flung back the cloak, a flamingly lovely vision.

"Not a penny less, or——"

"Sit down." he answered. "I suppose you know this is a penitentiary offense?"

"Do I look stupid?" she asked coolly. "You're very near snarled yesterday. You not only look stupid, but you are stupid—Miss Peggy Sinclair! Now, scream your head off, darling, for all I care."

The lovely pink drained instantly from her delicate features.

"Why, you thief, you fool," Ames continued. "did you think I was crazy enough to take a compartment for any woman in my name? I wrote the letter, signed them both in my pocket, and the one I handed the porter was signed Constance Drew!

"Furthermore, you red-haired pretty idiot, while this would be a hot mess for Mr. Bradford Ames, he has a good alibi. He's in New York at this very minute. Wire if you want to, and prove it. I look like him, but not enough to deceive any person who's ever had a gun of his cards that I had to your dear friend, your accomplished 'roper,' Mr. Royal Wood, of Chicago."

Constance Drew's pouting lips were trembling slightly.

"I don't see one single word you're saying," she announced, thumping her knee with a slender fist.

"No?" he answered. "Then go on, scream!"

She relaxed helplessly. "But why?" she asked querulously. "Why? Why did you?"

He gloated over her trmbling panic.

"Because when you came down the platform, Miss Peggy Sinclair, you turned to get on the train I saw it was Miss Peggy Sinclair saw who you were. And next was the flash sweetheart—but Miss Sinclair's old—old friend, Mr. Wood, who seemed more than willing to become acquainted, gave him a pass on of his cards that I had to your dear friend, your accomplished 'roper,' Mr. Royal Wood, of Chicago."

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"Who are you?" whispered the Sinclair girl, leaning forward.

"Do you remember when you were writing the Green Star Boats right after the war, sweetness?"

Her cheeks flared red as poppies.

"So so good as to dispense with familiarity," she said slowly.

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" leered the man. "I'm going to be familiar or not before we're thru, just as I please, and you're not even going to scream, unless I give a whisper, you're not."

Real terror stole into the girl's eyes then and hid there crouching.

"Oh, yes! About the Green Star boats," the man continued, and the lines in his hard bitten face deepened. "There was a mob working the smoking room who knew about you. Yes. You got in their way. They—none of them—liked you, sweetness. I'd say they had bad taste, very bad."

He rolled his tongue across his lips, watching her. "Well, a couple of weeks ago, I was at the theater with one of that same gang. And he saw you in the lobby. You and that rotten 'roper' of yours. So when I met Mr. Weed, I kept my eyes open. Satisfied now?"

"Oh, I—yes, yes, that's enough," she answered wearily. "Do you intend to tell me now who you really are?"

He grinned unpleasantly. "Why, no, I don't think I will, not today, my dear, not today. But I will tell you this much: I work the trains myself occasionally. I take everything you've got without a quiver—and I understand you generally carry quite a nice little wad. So, don't get shook on me this morning. I could use you. Yes. Sometimes I do a little work on the P. K. K. boats from the coast. Still I don't know." He wagged his head slowly. "I don't know. You're beautiful alright; but you certainly are dumb!"

"What now?" she flamed at him.

He rubbed his high nose with his finger, and drew a big cigar once more.

"Never mind," he answered. "Just stay on the train, sweetness, I'm not going to watch you, or not, just as you choose. But stay on, and in Los Angeles, well—we'll see."

She sat, shrugged, shapely shoulder. "As you wish," she answered, staring thru the window at a line of trees thru which the lights of a solitary farm house twinkled a moment and disappeared. The hard faced man studied the flowing cheek, the proud nose, rose petal skin, the pouting lips; and smiled.

At length she turned misty blue eyes toward him.

"I'm whipped alright," she admitted with a tired smile. "Will you please go and get me a couple of smoke cigars in a lady's compartment. It's not being done, Mister whatever-your-name-is."

"This cigar?" he said, glancing at it as he rose. "That's another thing. You were going to claim I attacked you. Why, you poor fool! What outsider—what man—would have believed you?" He put his hand on the door.

"Why, wh—what d—do you mean?" she stammered

"I could have done a fine lot of attacking, couldn't I, with each over an inch long on a lighted cigar!"

He shut the door softly from the outside.

The long level light that follows sunrise silhouetted the raw rock buttes south of the station at Trinidad.

The door of the compartment was ajar and the hawk-faced occupant was gazing thru the corridor window. Across the tracks on the side of the train he caught one glimpse of a slender, hurrying figure wrapped in a long fur cloak.

"Exit the lovely Constance Drew.—Peggy Sinclair—and how many more, depends she says not," he chuckled, and shut the door.

At intervals that day his fellow passengers observed him smiling absently, a smile that broadened on the morning following as he saw a gayly dressed feminine figure emerge from the row of shadowy stucco arches across from the Pasadena station.

As he threw himself from the group at the porter's step, the lady offered a pair of most kissable lips. At the conclusion of his ceremony she slipped her hand within his arm.

"Come along, Brad," she announced, "the car is right here. Do you know it's tremendously nice to see you again? Have you missed your little wife much?"

"Terribly! Everyone noticed it. Why, only the day I left, Amos Bendigo came in and asked me privately, 'Is Dick Prince! All my love to your charming wife.'"

She squeezed his arm ecstatically.

"Bradford, you're simply such delightful things to me. Are you just as nice to other women?"

Amos Bradford shrugged. "No," he said. "No, not always. In fact, there was a young lady on the train who was a friend—er, an acquaintance of mine. Did you know he'd just been made president of the Tuttle Trust? No? Well, it seems he isn't here on a holiday. And I'm afraid I had to be a trifle rude to the girl. I'm afraid she doesn't like me."

His wife gazed up at him with a tiny frown.

"Why, Bradford!" she said. "How could you?"

* * *

Reason Enough.

Judge—Explain to me just why you think that you're not guilty.

Prisoner—It was like this, Judge. I was dreaming that a fine dinner, consisting of roast goose, wine and everything, had been put before me when this jail bird turns over and wakes me up. I never even got a bite, and it made me so mad I landed on him.

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The White Desert.

(Continued From Page 2.)

thru, the others could not follow; if their attack were not swift enough, staunch enough, the slide that was sure to come sooner or later would carry with it mangled machinery and the torn forms of men into a chasm of death. One by one the final orders came—crisp, shouted, cursing commands, answered in kind. Then the last query:

"If there's a d—n man of you who's a coward, step out! Hear that? If you're afraid—come on—there's no stopping once you start!"

Engine after engine answered, in jeering, sarcastic tones, the belligerent cries of men hiding what pounded in their hearts, driving down by sheer will-power the primitive desires of self-preservation. Again was the call repeated. Again was it answered by men who snarled, men who cursed that they might not pray. And with it:

"A-w-w-w-w—right! Let 'er go!"

The whistles screamed. Up the grade, four engines to a plow, the jets of steam shrilling upward, coughing columns of smoke leaping blackly up the mountain side, the start was made, as the great, roaring mass of machinery gathered speed for the impact.

A jarring crash that all but threw the men of the first crew from their feet, and the Death Trail had been met. Then churning, snarling, roaring, the snow flying in cloud-like masses past them, the first plow bit its way deep into the tremendous mass, while sweating men, Barry Houston among them, crammed coal into the open, angry fire boxes, the sand streamed on greasy tracks—and the cavalcade went on.

A hundred yards—the beams knocking down the snow above and all but covering the engines which forced their way thru, only to leave as high a mass behind; while the whole mountain seemed to tremble; while the peaks above sent back roar for roar, and grim, determined men pulled harder than ever at the throttles and waited—for the breath of night again, or the crash of the avalanche.

A shout from Old Andy. A pull at the whistle, screeching forth its note of victory. From in front was it answered, then from the rear, and on and on, seemingly thru an interminable distance, as moonlit night came again, as the lesser plows in the rear swept their way clear of the Death Trail and ground onward and upward. But only for a moment. Then, the blare of the whistles was drowned in a greater sound, a roar that reverberated thru the hills like the bellow of a thousand thunders, the cracking and crashing of trees, the splintering of great rocks as the snows of the granite spires above the Death Trail loosed at last and crashed downward in an all-consuming rush of destruction.

Trees gave way before the constantly gathering mass of white and joined in the downfall. Great bowlders, abutting rocks, slides of shale! On it went, thundering toward the valley and the gleaming lake, at last to crash there; to send the ten-foot thicknesses of ice splintering like broken glass; to pyramid, to spray the whole nether world with ice and snow and scattering rock; then to settle, a jumbled conglomerate mass of destructiveness, robbed of its prey

And the men shouted, and screamed and beat at one another in their frenzy of happiness, in spite of the fact that the track had been torn away from behind them as tho it never had existed, and that they now were cut off entirely from the rest of the world. Only one snow-shed remained, with but a feeble bulwark of drifts before it. Already lights were gleaming down the [illegible] stretch, engines were puffing upward, bearing ties and rails and ballast and abuttment materials, on toward the expected, with men ready to repair the damage as soon as it was done. There were cries also from there below, the shout of men who were glad even as the crews of the engineers and firemen leaned from their cabs to answer.

Still the whistles screamed; all thru the night they screamed, as drift after drift yielded, as the eight-foot bit of the first giant auger gnawed and tore at the packed contents of the last shed atop Crestline; then roared and sang, while the hills sent back their outbursts with echoes that rolled, one into another, until at last the whole world was one terrific out-pouring of explosive sounds and shrill, shrieking blasts, as tho the mountains were bellowing their anger, their remonstrance at defeat. Eight feet, then eight feet more; steadily eight feet onward. Nor did the men curse at the sulphur fumes, nor rail at the steel-blue ice. It was the final fight; on the downgrade were lesser drifts, puny in comparison to what they had gone thru, simple, easily defeated obstacles to the giant machinery, which would work then with gravity instead of against it. Eight feet more—eight feet after that; they marked it off on the windows of the engine cabs with greasy fingers and counted the hours until success. Night faded. Dawn came and then—the sun! Clear and brilliant with the promise of spring again and of melting snows. The fight was the same as over

Sleep—and men who laughed, even as they snored, laughed with the subconscious knowledge of success, while the bunk cars which sheltered them moved onward, up to the peak, then started down the range. Night again—and Houston once more in the engine cab. But this time, the red glare of the firebox did not show as often against the sky; the stops were less frequent for the ice packs; once the men even sang!

Morning of the second day—and again the sunshine, causing dripping streams from the long, laden branches of the pines and spruce, filling the streams bank-full, here and there cutting thru the blanket of white to the dun-brown earth again. Work over, Houston leaned out the door of the bunk car, drinking in the sunshine, warm for the first time in weeks, it seemed—and warm in heart and spirit. If she would only keep her promise! If she would allow Medaine to see her! If she would tell her the truth—about the contract, the lease, and most of all that accusation. If

The whistles again—and crowded forms at the doors of the cars. Tabernacle was in the distance, while men and women waded thru the soggy snows to be the first to reach the train. Happiness gleamed on the features of the inhabitants of a beleaguered land shut away from the world for weeks, men and women who saw no shame in the tears which streamed down their cheeks, and who sought not to hide them. Eagerly Barry searched the thronging crowd, at last to catch sight of a gigantic figure, his wolf-dog beside him. He leaped from the car even before it had ceased to move.

"Ba'tiste!" he called. "Ba'tiste!"

Great arms opened wide. A sob came from the throat of a giant.

"Mon Baree! Mon Baree!" It was all he could say for a moment. Then, "Mon Baree, he have come back to Ba'teese. Ah, Golemar! Mon Baree, he have come back, he have come back."

"We've won, Ba'tiste! The line's open—they'll be running trains thru before night. And if she keeps her promise—"

"She?" Ba'tiste stared down at him. They had drawn away from the rest of the excited, noisy throng. "She? You mean——"

"Agnes. You've been taking care of her, haven't you? I found her—she promised that she would tell the truth for me when I got back, that she would explain the lease and contract and tell Medaine that it was all a lie. She——"

But Ba'tiste Renaud shook his head.

"No, Baree. Eet is the too late. I have [illegible] 'is' come—from there. I have close her eyes

CHAPTER XXIV

DEAD! Houston saw Medaine Robinette pass in the distance, and his eyes followed her until she had rounded the curve by the dead aspens—the eyes of lost hope. For it was upon life that he had planned and dreamed; that the woman of the lonely cabin would stand by her promise made in a time of stress and right at least some of the wrongs which had been his burden. But now——

"She—she didn't tell you anything before she went?"

Ba'tiste shook his head.

"She would not speak to me. Nothing would she tell me. At first I go alone—then yesterday, when the snow, he pack, I take Golemar. Then she is unconscious. All day and night I stay beside the bed, but she do not open her eye. Then, with the morning, she sigh, and pouff! She is gone."

"Without a word." It spelled blackness for Houston where there had been light. "I—I suppose you've taken charge of everything."

"Oui. But I have look at nothing—if that is what you mean."

"No—I just had something here that you ought to have." Houston fumbled in his pockets. "She would want it around her neck, I feel sure, when she is——"

But the sudden glare in Ba'tiste's eyes stopped him as he brought forth the crucifix and its tangled chain. The giant's hands raised. His big lips twisted. A lunge and he had come forward, savage, almost beast-like.

"You!" He bellowed. "Where you get that? Hear me, where you get that

"From her. She——"

"Then come! Come—quick with me!" He almost dragged the younger man away, hurrying him toward the sled and its broad-backed old horse. "We must go to the cabin out—yes! Hurry!" Houston saw that he was trembling. "It is the thing I look for—the thing I look for!"

"Ba'tiste! What do you mean?"

"My Julienne," came hoarsely. "It is my Julienne's!"

Already they were in the sled, the wolf-dog perched between them, and hurrying along the mussy road, which followed the lesser raises of the snow, taking advantage of every windbreak and avoiding the greater drifts of the highway [illegible] Two miles they went, the horse urged to their greatest speed [illegible] with a leap Ba'tiste cleared the [illegible] and motioned for Houston to follow [illegible] him

"Come with me! Golemar, you shall stay behind. You shall fall in the drift."

"The old man was talking excitedly, almost childishly. [illegible] come. [illegible] own self that must be careful Ba'teese, he cannot watch you. Come!"

At a run, he went forward, to thread his way thru the pines, to flounder where the snow had not melted, to go waist-deep at times, but still to rush onward at a speed which taxed even Houston's younger strength to keep him in sight. The wolf-dog buried itself in the snow, Houston pulling it forth time after time, and lugging it at long intervals. Then at last came the little clearing—and the cabin. Ba'tiste already was within

Houston avoided the figure on the bed as he entered and dropped beside the older man, already dragging forth the drawers of the bureau and pawing excitedly among the trinkets there. He gasped and pulled forth a string of [illegible] holding them tremblingly [illegible] ring from [illegible] a [illegible] with a curly strand of [illegible] The giant sobbed.

"My Pierre—eet was my Pierre!"

"What's that?" Houston had raised suddenly, was staring in the direction of an old commode in the corner. At the door the wolf-dog sniffed and snarled. Ba'tiste, bending among the lost trinkets that once had been his wife's, did not hear. Houston grasped him by the shoulder and shook him excitedly.

"Ba'tiste! Ba'tiste! There's some one hiding—over there in the corner. I heard sounds—look at Golemar!"

"Hiding? No. There is no one here no one but Ba'teese and his memories. No one—

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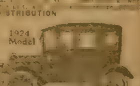

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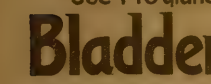

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"I tell you I heard some one. The [illegible] know anything. She told me—that's all [illegible] I saw—"

He broke off suddenly and crouched flatten himself against the wall. The yellow blaze of aimless revolver fire had spurted from the corner; then the plunging figure of a small, gasping, limping man, who rushed past Houston to the door, wavered there, and once more raised the revolver. But he did not fire.

A furry, snarling thing had leaped at him, knocking the revolver from his hand. It was Baptiste. Then [illegible] a struggle [illegible] Teeth had clutched at the throat of the man fighting [illegible] raised the revolver to the shoulder without, Goleman, his hold broken by the fall, striving again for the death clutch, the man screaming in sudden frantic fear.

"Take him off!" The voice of the thin-visaged Fred Thayer was shrill now, "Take him off—I'll tell you about it—she did it. Take him off!"

"Goleman!" Baptiste had appeared in the doorway. Below the dog whined in obedience to his command and edged back, teeth still bared, eyes vigilant, waiting for the first movement of the man on the ground. Houston went forward and stood peering down at the frightened, huddled form of Thayer, wiping the blood from the fang wound in his neck.

"You'll tell us about what?" came with sudden [illegible]

The man stared, suddenly aware that he had spoken of a thing that had been mentioned by neither Baptiste nor Houston. His lips worked crookedly. He tried to smile, but it ended only in a [illegible]

"I thought you fellows were looking for something. I—I—wanted to get the dog off."

"We were. We found it, Baptiste," and Houston forced back the tigerish form of the Canadian. "You don't [illegible] walk in front of us. I'm—I'm afraid to trust you right now. And don't turn back. Do you [illegible]

The big hands worked convulsively. The eyes took on a newer, fiercer glare.

"He is the man, Houston, conscience, not speak when there is no one to ask [illegible] He—"

"Stop it, Baptiste. Please." Houston's voice was that of a pleading son. Once more the dog's jaws knotted, the arms [illegible] and the shoulder [illegible] were [illegible] in a sudden beast-like expression.

"Baptiste! Do you want to add murder to it? This is out of our hands now; it's a matter of law. Now, go ahead—for me."

With an effort the Canadian obeyed, the wolf-dog trotting beside him. Houston followed, one hand locked about the buckle of the [illegible] belt, the other half supporting him as he limped and reeled thru the snow.

"It's a hip—" The man's mind had gone to trivial things. "I sprained it—but ten days ago. I've been living over here with her up till the storm. Then I had to be at camp. I—"

"That was your child, then?"

Fred Thayer was silent. Harry Houston repeated the question commandingly. There could be no secrecy now; events had gone too far. For a third time the accusation came and the man beside him turned angrily.

"Whose would you think it was?"

Houston did not answer. They stumbled on thru the snow-drifted woods, finally to reach the open space leading to the sleigh. Thayer drew back.

"What's the use of taking me into town? he begged. "She's dead and gone; you can't harm her now."

"We're not inquiring about her."

"But I—I—no one but me did it. She told me. After the first got sick. Those are her things in there. They're—"

"Have I asked you about anything?" Houston bit the words at him. Again the man was silent. They reached the sled, and Baptiste pointed to the seat.

"In there," he ordered. "Baptiste will walk. Baptiste afraid—no close. And then, in silence, the trip to town was made, at last to draw up in front of the [illegible] Houston called to a [illegible]

"Is the phone working—to Montview?"

"I—I think it is. Got it opened up yesterday."

"Then call up over there and tell the [illegible] we want him. It has to do with the Renaud [illegible]

The loafer sprang to the street and veered across, returning [illegible] later, while Baptiste [illegible] hurried arrangements regarding the silent form of the lonely cabin. A few moments later, [illegible] the [illegible] house lobby was crowded, while [illegible] Houston, reverting to the bitter [illegible] had learned [illegible] cross-examinations, took his place in front of the [illegible] of mail.

"In the first place, Thayer," he commanded, "you might as well know one [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] Renaud and myself [illegible]

"I—I thought you were [illegible]

"You know that's a lie. But that's a matter for the courtroom. There are greater things [illegible]

"About that other—" Still he clung to his shred of a story, the only possibility of hope. Conscience had prompted the first outcry; now there was nothing to do but follow the lead. "I don't [illegible]

Houston had edged forward. "She is dead. And because she is dead—because she have suffer and die, you would lay to her door murder! Eet is the lie! Where then is the ten thousand dollar she took—if she kill my Julienne? Eh? Where is the gun with which she shot her? Ah, you cringe! For why you do that—for why do you not look at Baptiste when he talk about his Julienne? Eh? Is eet that you are afraid? Is eet that your teeth are on your tongue to keep eet from the truth? Out! You are the man—you are the man!"

"I don't know anything about it. She told me she did it—that those were Mrs. Renaud's things."

"Ah! Then you have nev' see that ring, which my Julienne, she wore on ner finger. Ah, no! You have nev' see, in all the time that you come to Baptiste house, the string of bead about her neck. Out. Eet is the lie, you tell. You have nev' seen the gif'!"

And [illegible] battle progressed, the old man charging, the frowning, sullen-eyed [illegible] in their chair replying in monosyllables, or refusing to answer at all. An hour passed, while Tabernacle crowded the little lobby and overflowed to the street. One by one Baptiste brought forth the trinkets and laid them before the thin-faced man. He forced them into his hands. He demanded that he explain why he had said nothing of their presence in the lonely cabin when he had known them, every one, from having seen them time after time in the home of Renaud.

The afternoon [illegible] The sheriff arrived [illegible] He arrested Wood and Baptiste, with a sudden [illegible] of the

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[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [

Land, a sudden break of reserve. Thayer leaned forward and rubbed his gnarled hands, one against the other.

"All right!" he snapped. "Have it your way. No use in trying to lay it on the woman—you could prove an alibi for her. You're right. I killed them both."

"Both?" They stared at him. Thayer nodded, still looking at the floor, his tongue licking suddenly dry lips.

"Yes, both of them. I brought on the other . . . Mrs. Renaud and John Corbin—they called him Tom Langdon back East."

CHAPTER XXV

IT WAS staggering in its unexpectedness. A gasp came from the lips of Barry Houston. He felt himself reeling—only to suddenly straighten, as the crushing weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He whirled excitedly and grasped the nearest onlooker.

"Get Baptiste Robinette. Hurry! Tell her that it is of the utmost importance—that I have found the proof. She'll understand."

Then, struggling to reassure himself, he turned again to the prisoner. Two hours ago the bleak glint of day, the door opened, and a woman came to his side, where he was finishing the last of many closely written sheets of paper. He looked up at her, boyishly, happily. Without waiting for her permission, he grasped her hand, and then, as too eager for her to hear, he turned to the worn-faced man, now slumped dejectedly in his chair.

"You understand, Thayer, that this is your written confession."

The man nodded.

"Given in the presence of the sheriff, (t Baptiste Renaud, of myself, and the various citizens of Tabernacle that you see here?"

"Yes."

"Of your own free will, without threats or violence?"

"I guess so."

"And are you willing to sign it?"

The man hesitated. Then:

"I'd want to know what I was signing."

"Certainly. I intend to read it to you—so that all witnesses may hear it. It is then to be filed with the district attorney. You can signify its correctness or incorrectness after every paragraph. Is that agreeable?"

"I guess so."

A pause. At last:

"My name is Fred Thayer. I am 44 years of age. Prior to about a year ago, I was employed by the Empire Lake Mill & Lumber Company as superintendent. I had occupied this position for some fifteen or twenty years, beginning with it when it was first started by Mr. Houston of Boston." Is that right?"

A nod from the accused. Houston went on:

"I learned from the first that I was going to be taken in partnership with Mr. Houston, altho nothing was ever said about it. I just took it for granted. However, when years passed and nothing was done about it, I began to force matters. My little mill was run down, knowing that Mr. Houston was getting old, and that he might be willing to sell out to me. But he had enough.—At that time, I didn't know where I was going to get the money, but hoped that Mr. Houston would let me have the mill and acreage on some sort of a payment basis. I went back to him about it a couple of times, but he wouldn't listen to me. He said that he wanted to either close the thing up for cash or keep on running it in the hope of making something of it." That's all right, isn't it, Thayer?"

"Yes."

"I tried two or three times to get him to sell out to me, but we couldn't get together on the terms. He always wanted cash, and I couldn't furnish it—altho I pretended that I had the money all right, but that I simply did not want to tie it all up at once. About this time—I think it was two years or more ago; I am not exactly clear on the dates—a nephew of his named Thomas Landdon came out here, under the name of John Corbin. He had been a black sheep and was now wandering about the country, doing anything he could to get his head for a living. I had known him since boyhood and gave him a job under his assumed name. He pretended that he was very close to Mr. Houston, and I thought maybe he could help me get the plant. But he never was worth as much as mine.' Have I taken that down correctly, Thayer?"

"Yes. Except about Langdon. He told me when he came here that his uncle had sent him out to straighten him up. But I don't guess it makes much difference."

However, nevertheless, made the changes, glancing up once to assure himself that Madame still was there. She had not left his side. He went on with his reading.

"By this time, the mill had gotten to be a regular old white elephant, and I almost had myself believing that Houston had promised me more than he had given me. Then, a woman came out here, an Agnes Jordon, a stenographer, on her vacation. I met her and learned that she was from Boston." A slight pressure on the hand itself on Houston's arm. He glanced down to see Madame Robinette's hand, clasped tight. "She spent nearly the whole summer here and I made love to her. I asked her to marry me, and she told me that maybe would. She was really very much in love with me. I didn't care about her—I was working for a purpose. I wanted to use her—to get her in Houston's office. I wanted to find out what was going on, so that I would know in advance, and so that I could prepare for it by having breakage at the mill, to stop contracts and run things farther down than ever, so the old man would get disgusted and sell out at my terms. I knew there would be a mint of money for me if I could get hold of that mill. At the end of her vacation, she went back to Boston and got a job with Houston, as an office clerk. Almost the first thing that she wrote me was that the old man was thinking about selling out to some concern back East."

Houston looked toward the accused man for his confirmation, then continued.

"While she had been out here I had told her that Houston had promised to take me into partnership and that he had gone back on his word. I put it up to her pretty strong about how I had been tricked into working for him for years, and she was sympathetic with me, of course, inasmuch as she was in love with me. Naturally, when she heard this, she wrote me right away. It made me desperate. Then I thought of Ba'tiste Renaud."

"Ah!" The word was accompanied by a sharp intake of breath as the big French-Canadian moved closer to hear again the story of a murder. But the sheriff motioned him back. The emotions of the old trapper were not to be trusted. The recital went on:

"Everybody around this country had always talked about how rich he was. The reason was a saying that he didn't believe in banks and that he kept more than a hundred thousand dollars in his little cabin. At this time, both he and his son were away at war, and I thought I could steal this money, place it in other hands, and then work things so that if I did get hold of the mill, people around here would merely think I had borrowed the money and bought the mill with it. By this time, a cousin of Miss Jierdon's, a fellow named Jenkins, had gotten a job with Houston and was working with her, and of course, I was hearing everything that went on. It looked like the deal was going thru, and it forced me to action—so one night I watched Mrs. Renaud and saw her leave the house. I thought she was going to town. Instead, after I'd gotten into the cabin, she came back, surprising me. There wasn't anything else to do. I killed her, with a revolver."

"Diable!"

"Easy, Ba'tiste. That's the way you gave it to me, isn't ft, Thayer?"

"Yes. I shot twice at her. The first bullet missed."

Again the door of the tiny lobby opened and closed, and a form edged forward—Blackburn, summoned from his mill. Thayer glanced at him, then lowered his eyes. Houston made the additional notation on the confession and went back to his reading:

"When I found the deed box, there was only ten thousand dollars in it instead of the fortune that I had supposed was there. I was about to take it out and stuff it into my pocket, when I heard a noise outside the window. Thinking it was Renoud's wolf-dog, and that he might give the alarm, I pushed the box under my coat and ran out the back door. The next day, Corbin—or Langdon—came to me and demanded his share of what I had stolen. He said that he had overheard the deed box after I had killed the woman, that he had made the noise outside the window. I put him off—drew up a check for all but a few hundred. At first he threatened that he would go to the sheriff at Montview, and for several days he came to me, telling me that this was the last chance that he would give me if I didn't let him have his share. I played him for time. Then he began to

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was the result of the first week of B. Collander, of Massachusetts.

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beg small amounts of money from me, promising to keep still if I gave them to him. I guess this kept up for two or three months, the amounts getting larger all the time. At last, I wouldn't stand it any longer. He threatened me again—and then, suddenly, one day disappeared. I hurried to Montview, thinking, of course, that he had gone there, hoping to catch him on the train, but no one had seen him. Then I went to Tabernacle and learned that he had bought a ticket for Boston, and that a day had left on a morning train. I knew what was up then; he was going back to tell Old Man Houston and try to steal from my shoes when I was arrested. But I beat him there by going over the range in an automobile, and taking an earlier train for Boston. I picked him up when he arrived and trailed him to young Houston's office. After that I saw them go to a cafe, and from there to a prize fight. I bought a ticket and watched them from the rear of the hall. I was through with me—I had made up my mind to kill them both. I thought Langdon had told. After the fight, they stood talking for a while in the rear. Young Houston had gotten a mallet from the timekeeper. On the way home, I could hear them talking, and I heard Houston asking Langdon why he wanted to see the old man. By that I knew that it hadn't been told yet—and I felt safer. Then they got in a quarrel, and my chance came.

"It was over the mallet—Langdon took it away from his cousin and started to fight him. Houston ran. When he was well out of sight, I crept forward. No one was near. Langdon still had the mallet in his hand. I crept up behind him and clubbed my revolver, hitting him on the head with it. He fell—dead—and I knew I was safe, that Houston would be accused.

Barry looked earnestly at the man before him.

"That's all true, isn't it, Thayer?"

"I haven't made any objection, have I?" came surlily.

"I merely wanted to be sure. But to go on: Then I thought of a way to get what I wanted from Miss Jierdon. This was several months afterward, just before the trial. I argued that I was sure young Houston hadn't committed the murder, and that if some woman could testify to that fact that Langdon had fit at mallet, it might free Houston, and make a hit with the old man and that maybe he would make good on his promises. I did it pretty skilfully and she listened to me, largely, I guess, because she was in love with young Houston. By the way, it ended with her testifying at the trial in a sort of negative way. I didn't care about that—it was something else I wanted. Later, after the old man died, I used it. I wanted her to switch some papers on young Mr. Houston for me, and she bucked against it. Then I told her that she had done worse things, that she had perjured herself, and that unless she stayed by me, she could be sent to the penitentiary. Of course, I didn't tell her in those words, but I got it all right in the way of making a criminal out of her already, so that the thing she was going to do wouldn't seem a bad to her. I wasn't foolish enough to threaten her. Besides, I told her that the mill should have been rightfully mine, that the old man had lied to me and gotten me to work for him for years at starvation wages, on promises that we would be mine some time, and that he had neither taken me in partnership, nor left it to me in the will. I made her promise to help her in the transfer of the papers. It was a lease and stumpage contract. He affixed a notary seal to it. He thinks was illegitimate, of course. Shortly after that, young Houston came out here again, and I got her to come, too. I wanted to see what he was up to. He fired me, and while he was in Denver and Richard away, I made love to Miss Jierdon and took her for a walk, while one of the other men kept watch for the crook who I knew would be out didn't wake up. On the way back, Miss Jierdon saw that the mill was burning, and I circled her waist with my arm to support her. She accused him, and it brought about a little quarrel between Miss Jierdon and young Houston. I played her, by devious ways, to pretend that she was in love with him—keeping that perfectly clear, though, and let her all the time and constantly harping on how, even tho he was a nice young fellow, he was robbing me of the profits of something that was rightfully ours. All this time, I had dodged marrying her, promising that I would do it when the mill was mine. In the meantime, with the lease and contract in my hands, I had worked up with this man here, Black—and he had started a mill for me. I guess Miss Jierdon had gotten to thinking a little on Houston's being after me, because when I forced her to the final thing of telling some lies about him to a young woman, she did it, but went away mad at me and threatening never to see me again. But a little while later, she came back into relations, while I was there at the Houston camp, hadn't been exactly what to—could have been. Miss Jierdon is dead—she had stayed in a little cabin in the woods. I had lived with her there. About ten days ago, the baby died, while I was laid up at camp with a sprained hip. Today I went there to find her dead, and while I was there, Renaud and young Houston arrived. So, this is all I know. I make this statement of my own free will, without coercion, and I swear it to be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

The little lobby milled and buzzed, drowning the scratching of the pen as a trembling man signed his confession, page by page. Then came the clink of handcuffs. A moment later two figures had departed in the dusk—the sheriff and Fred Thayer, bound for the jail at Montview. Houston straightened, to find a short, bulky form before him, Henry Blackburn.

"Well?" questioned that person. "I guess it's up to me."—"I haven't got much chance against that."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this," and the bulky Blackburn drew a nervous, sweating hand across his brow. "I ain't above dealing with crooks, I'll admit that. I've done a few things in my life that haven't been any too straight, or any tdo noble, and when Thayer came to me with this contract and lease, I didn't ask any questions. My lawyer said it was O. K. That was enough for me. But somehow or other, I kind of draw the line at murder. I'm in your hands, Houston. I've got a mill up there that I've put a lot of money in, it ain't worth the powder to blow it up now—to me, anyway. But with you, it's different. If you want to make me a fair offer, say the word, and I'll go more than half-way with you. What say you?"

"Is tomorrow time enough?"

"Tomorrow—or the next day—or the next week. Suits me. I'm in your hands."

Then he went on, leaving only three figures in the lobby—the bent, silent form of Ba'tiste Renaud, grave, but rewarded at last in his faithful search; the radiant form of Houston, free with a freedom that he hardly believed could exist; and a girl who walked to the window and stood looking out a moment before she turned to him. Then impetuously she faced him, her eyes searching his, her hands tight clasped, her whole being one of supplication.

"I'm sorry," she begged. "Can you—will you forgive me?"

Boyishly Barry Houston reached forward and drew away a strand of hair that had strayed from place, a spirit of venture in his manner, a buoyant tone in his voice.

"Say it again. I like it!"

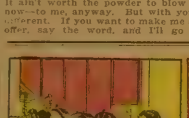
"But I am—don't you believe me?"

"Of course. But then—I—I——" Then he caught her hands. "Will you go with me while I telegraph?" he asked in sudden earnestness. "I want to wire—to the papers back in Boston and tell them that I've been vindicated. Will you ——"

"I'd be glad to."

They went out the door together, Houston beaming happily downward, the girl close beside him, her arm in his. And it was then that the features of Ba'tiste Renaud lost their gravity and sorrow. He looked after them, his eyes soft and contented. Then his big hands parted slowly. His lips broke into a smile of radiant happiness.

And it was with the same glad light in his eyes that three months later Ba'tiste Renaud stood on the shores of Shipire Lake, his wolf-dog beside him, looking out over the rippling sheen of the water. The snow was gone from the hills now; the colors were again brilliant, the blues and purples and greens and reds vying, it seemed, with one another, in a constantly recurring contest of beauty. Afar off, logs were sliding in swift succession down the skidways, to lose themselves in the waters, then to bob along toward the current that would carry them to the flume. The boys cried and quarreled in the aspens; in a little bay, an old beaver made his first sally of the year, and by many signs of its tail warned the rest of the colony that his mates were near. Distinctly, from down the creek stream which led from the lake, there sounded the snarl of giant saws and the hum of machinery, where, a few miles, the logs traveled into a manufactured state thru a smooth-working process that led from jacker to "kicker," thence to the winnforms and the shotgun carriages; into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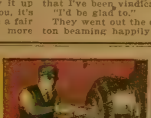
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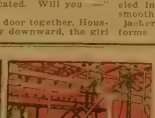
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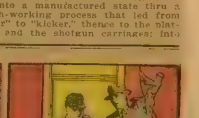
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the mad rush of the bank saws, while the rumbling rolls caught the offal to cart it away; then surging on, to the edgers and trimmers and kilns. Great trucks rumbled along the roadways. Faintly a locomotive whistled, as the switch engine from Tabernacle clanked to the mills for the make-up of its daily stub-train of lumber cars. But the attention of Ba'tiste Renaud was on none of these. Out in a safe portion of the lake was a boat, and within it sat two persons, a man and a woman, their rods flashing as they made their casts, now drawing slowly backward for another whip of the fly, now bending with the swift leap of a captive trout. And he watched them with the eyes of a father looking upon children who have fulfilled his every hope, children deeply, greatly beloved.

As for the man and the woman, they laughed and glanced at each other as they cast, or shouted and shrilled with the excitement of the leaping trout as the fly caught fair and the struggle of the rod and reel began, to end with another flapping form in the creel, another delicacy for the table at camp. But at last the girl leaned back, and her fly trailed disregarded in the water.

"Barry," she asked, "what day's tomorrow?"

"Wednesday," he said, and cast again in the direction of a dead, jutting tree, the home of more than one three-pounder. She pouted.

"Of course it's Wednesday. But what else?"

"I don't know. Let me see. Twentieth, isn't it?"

This time her rod flipped in mock anger.

"Barry," she commanded, "what day is tomorrow?"

He looked at her blankly.

"I give it up," came after deep thought. "What day is tomorrow?"

She pressed tight her lips, striving bravely for sternness. But in vain. An upward curve made its appearance at the corners. The blue eyes twinkled. She laughed.

"Foolish!" she chided. "I might have expected you to forget. It's our first monthiversary!"

THE END.

Tell Me Your Problem

By Peggy Parsons

**A word of counsel when the heart is in it
May clear a year of trouble in a minute.**

Dear Miss Parsons: I have been going with a girl for two years steady and I love her very much. She recently told me that she loved another better than she loved me. This of course angered me as she knew that I loved her very much. I am nearly 30 and she is just 19, so sometimes I think that she is just a trifler and not really sensible enough to love anyone. Should I give her up?
TOM.

It looks as if there were nothing else for you to do but give up this girl, since she has gone so far as to tell you that she loves another better than she loves you. You must remember that she is still quite young and probably not ready to settle down to one man. If this is true wait until she is ready to settle down with you without your having to force her. Be attentive and kind to her and at the same time you might appear a little indifferent when she is about.

—

Dear Miss Parsons: I am a brunette with very pretty curls and my mother will not consent to my bobbing my hair. I am 13 years old and all my friends think I am older because I have to let my hair grow long. My uncle is a barber and sometimes I feel just like going to him and having my curls cut. Should I keep the curls or cut them off?
CURLY LOCKS.

If you are blessed with such beautiful hair, why should you want to have it cut off? Keep the curls as you would probably be disappointed if you were to cut them off. I am sure that you are imagining that your friends believe you to be older because your hair is long. Long curly hair would make you appear more girlish and younger than if it were cut. Keep the curls, as it is fashionable now to be different.

—

Dear Peggy: My beau has told me that he is going to move away from here and he has asked me to promise not to have dates with any one while he is away. We are both just 18 and I love a good time with all my friends, so don't feel like making such a promise. He says that he loves me very much and I think a great deal of him. What should I do?
EIGHTEEN.

Do not promise your sweetheart anything that you do not intend to live up to. If you want to go out with your friends during his absence, do not tell him that you will remain at home and be true to him, because he will soon find it out and then he will lose all confidence in you. Be fair with him and do not make promises you do not intend to keep.

—

Dear Miss Parsons: I am in love with a girl who goes with a girl friend who bears a bad reputation. I don't believe my sweetheart knows of the things which are said about the two of them when they are together. Should I try to break up their friendship or will she think that it is jealousy on my part?
CONCERNED.

Are you sure that it isn't jealousy on your part, that causes you to want to break up the friendship of your sweetheart and her chum? Since you have mentioned it, it occurs to me that possibly you are feeling that way about it. If these things are true, you could perhaps tell her in a way which would not make her angry, but when a young man starts breaking up the friendship of two girls, he generally gets into "hot water." Be diplomatic about it and be sure that this talking is not just "talk."

—

Dear Miss Peggy: I am a girl 15 with lots of troubles. I am not very pretty, but everyone tells me that I am attractive because I am always joking and cutting up capers. I love a boy very much, but he doesn't seem to care a great deal for me. What could I do to make him love me? He goes about with lots of girls, but sometimes I think that he likes me in a way.
RED HEAD.

Perhaps this young man is attracted by your actions; however, do not be too joking or it might appear that you are only trying to win him. Have you ever tried acting more sedately? He may care for a girl who is more quiet. A girl can be too peppy and soon become tiresome. Do not be this kind, as they are the ones from whom the men run. If it's natural for you to be full of life, this is a different thing, but always reserve a certain amount of dignity which you can display if necessary.

—

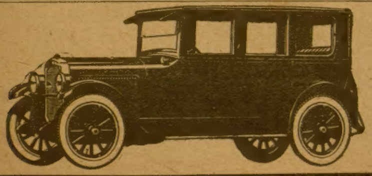
Dear Miss Parsons: Will you please settle an argument for me, as I am quite undecided as to what I should do. I am very much in love with my first cousin and we have decided to get married. My mother is very much opposed to this marriage, altho my father wishes it. This boy is the son of my father's brother and a very fine man. Should we give each other up and be miserable for the rest of our lives, or should we go away and be married regardless of what people say. Our happiness means everything to us. I am 20 and he is 22.
JEFFRY.

There has been quite a bit of arguing over the question of cousins marrying, particularly first cousin. In fact, this has been one of the most discussed subjects probably in many a day. There are some States in the country which do not prohibit the marriage of first cousins, but deciding for another about such a marriage is a very delicate proposition. This is a question that you will have to solve alone. Of course your happiness means a great deal to you and before you are married you should look at it from every possible angle. There have been many happy marriages of first cousins, but there have also been many marriages of first cousins which have led to very pathetic endings. Think it over and decide for yourself. This is one of the questions few people can help you with.

—

Dear Miss Parsons: I am 18 years old and in love with a boy 16. We were engaged until just recently, when he told me that he could never marry me. I have a ring and he has asked for me to return it to him. I have been out with other boys quite a bit, but he has not gone with other girls. What should I do?
GWEN.

This young man has a perfectly good right to change his mind about the girls. He is too young to even think of settling down to marry. Continue going with other boys and seek the companionship of other young men either as old or older than yourself. It is my opinion that a husband should be as old if not older than his wife. There is more happiness found for couples of this comparison, rather than of the opposite.



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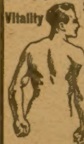

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All Thieves' Trail

(Continued From Page 14.)

He turned around and retraced his steps rapidly. The smell of coffee still hung in the air as he searched the heap of bowlders for Hunter. But Hunter was not in sight! Doane called again and again, his voice echoing and re-echoing from the rocks—but Hunter neither answered nor appeared. Hunter had strangely disappeared in an open country where concealment seemed impossible.

Then like a thunderclap a sharp roar issued from the rock itself. And faintly, as the from another world, a voice called: "Doane! Doane!"

DOANE jerked. It was Hunter's voice, weakened and quavering. Doane decided that the explosion and the voice had come from a fissure in the wall of rock to the right, and leaped toward it. As he ran the smell of coffee became stronger. The crack in the rock was large enough to admit a man. Doane ducked inside. A narrow passage, formed by the incomplete junction of two rocks, led him inward. When he jumped he found himself inside a dark hollow, lighted only by a crevice above, thru which drifts of smoke were floating.

A moment he stood still, confused by the sudden darkness. The smell of coffee, strongest now, mingled with the pungency of wood smoke. Red spots glowed in front of him, which, jumping blades of crimson—a fire. Then another deafening roar burst out. A bullet spattered against the rock. If he stood still, he realized, he might be shot dead in an instant; he moved slowly, cautiously. He saw the still form of Hunter lying on the gray floor, but resisted an impulse to run forward into the beam of light from the aperture above. He could not tell if Hunter was dead; he clinched his fists and waited. Then he discerned, dimly, across the cave, another man, crouching, tottering, leveling a six-shooter unsteadily. Instantly Doane sprank forward.

The other man's gun barked. The hot steel burned his cheek as he tore it from the other man's grasp and sent it clattering across the stone floor. He jumped back. The man in the corner rushed, snarling—jumped—threw himself on Doane like an enraged gorilla, kicking and clawing.

Clawlike fingers dug into Doane's neck, tore fiercely at his hair, scratched across his face, dug into his eyes. He whirled around wildly, attempting to throw the thing off his back. He pounded his adversary against the wall like a huge hammer, until the talons digging into his flesh loosened, and he threw the torturous hands off his shoulders. He turned a moment, dazed. Then he flung himself down on the form of the other man as it rolled across the floor toward the gun. They rolled over and over, thumbs prodding into each other's necks, crushing their windpipes . . . Doane shrieked when his back passed over the glowing embers of the fire. Blended to a desperate effort by the pain, he tore up.

The other man, also, staggered to his feet. He had found the gun—he drew it up quickly! Doane struck out, catching his adversary squarely on the chin with his fist. The gun dropped out of the other man's hand as he staggered. Then stiffly he fell. His head struck the edge of a half-buried rock; he lay still. Panting, his fists still clinched, Doane swayed above him, waiting for him to rise. But the other man was cleanly knocked unconscious.

Hunter's voice came again weakly: "Doane!"

Doane's blistered back pained afresh as he stooped to assist Hunter to his feet. Hunter's arm was bleeding. And torn by a bullet. . . . "Bandage it!" Sandercliff aroused it. Hunter said breathlessly:

"I followed that smell right into this rock. First thing I knew this hombre jumped on me. I heard you yellin' before, but I couldn't get out. Then you broke away, and he shot—got me in the arm. It's that dummed stranger we crushed last night—Doane, I reckon."

They moved about the gloomy cave rapidly. Under a heap of blankets beside the smoldering fire they found a kneaded kerchief, heavy and round; untying this, they bared a pile of golden pebbles which doubtless had been removed from their vaults.

"It's our stuff, by crackey!" Doane exclaimed. Then the pain of his blistered back caused him to wince.

"It's all here!" Hunter echoed. The movement of his body disturbed his disabled arm, caused him to moan.

"Old Sheriff Gunster sure was right," Doane said. "All three of us tried to steal that gold, and all three of us took the same trail. Gunster sure knowed what he was talkin' about!" Then he stopped, and as the memory of Hunter's attempt at double-crossing him came back, his mood suddenly changed. "You skunk, you tried to steal mine from me!"

Hunter sneered. "You would 'a' stolen mine, you varmint, if this stranger hadn't got it first!"

Doane spat disgustedly. "I'm shore not goin' back to live with the likes of you. You might knife me in the back any day. I'm goin' to take my share and get out. We can sell the placer and split the price. I reckon I don't want to see your ugly face around me any more."

Hunter snorted. "Sounds good to me! Glad to see you go! Take your half and get out—pronto!"

THEY divided the gold with brutal accuracy, each wincing and gasping with the pain of his injury. When they finished, Doane stuffed two sacks with his share of the gold; and because Hunter's arm was useless, filled Hunter's also, and pushed them into Hunter's pocket with a roughness calculated to make plain there was no sympathy in his act.

"Now go 'long!" he ordered.

They saw that the unconscious man would soon recover. Blinking dazedly in the light, they went out the crevice. They started off in diverging directions without speaking a farewell. "Good riddance!" Doane declared aloud, hoping Hunter would hear him. He walked carefully to avoid jarring his back. A long time he walked with angry vigor, muttering now and then uncomplimentary comments on the cupidity of the man who had been his partner—and completely ignored his own treachery. Then this gradually became plain to him, and his steps lagged. He glanced back several times thru the trees; then stopped, and tried to find Hunter. Hunter was not to be seen. Doane wagged his head slowly.

"I oughtn't to 'a' done that," he said to himself. "One of us is just as bad as t' other. Neither of us 'ought. He'll have a bad time with that arm of his'n, too, I reckon." The pain of his blistered back caused him to stop breathing. He wondered if he should go back and search for Hunter, but his bitter stubbornness overcame his softer judgment, and he turned about again. Slowly he walked on. The trees thinned again.

"Don't see how I'm goin' to get along," he mumbled to himself. "Hunter's a tricky critter, but all them years has made me sorta used to him."

And immediately Hunter passed out of the fringe of trees a short distance away!

"Hunter, you mangy old pup! Can't I ever get rid o' you?"

Hunter shuffled from one foot to the other. "Reckon' I didn't figure I'd find you this a-way. Reckon I should 'a' gone over yonder."

Doane turned away; a sudden pang that shot thru his burned back made him halt and groan. Hunter at the same time exclaimed painfully with the torture of his lacerated arm. They stared at each other, overcome by a rush of friendly compassion for each other, and embarrassed by the evidence of it.

"Guess you'd better let me fix up that arm of yourn, Hunter. Pizen might set in."

"You better let me dress up that back of yourn, Doane. You can't go to it yourself to doctor it."

Doane breathed deeply. "Well—now—say—I guess I was a sort of a low down rapscallion to try to steal that gold you worked so dum hard for, Hunter," he admitted.

Hunter shifted again. "I was a skunk fer tryin' to steal yours, Doane."

"There's a heap more metal back there in that place, old-timer."

"Reckon we ought to keep on working it together, hey, pard?"

Slowly they grinned at each other, with moisture shining in their eyes, and came closer together.

"Old Sheriff Gunster was more'n right, Hunter, old feller," Doane said. "I reckon our trails'll be twisted together like as long as we live."

"Reckon so, pard. Reckon I don't want 'em untwisted, either. Hey?"

They nodded solemnly and contentedly toward the cabin on Knob Point, so serenely waiting for their return.

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